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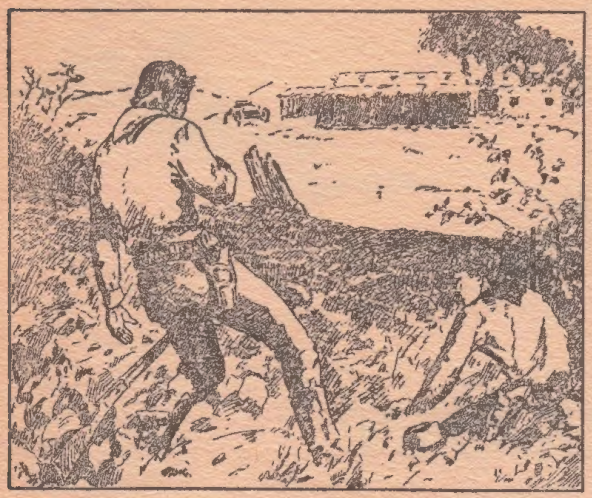
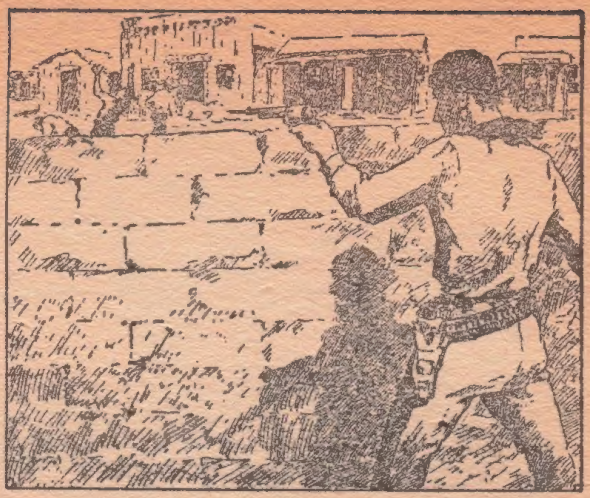


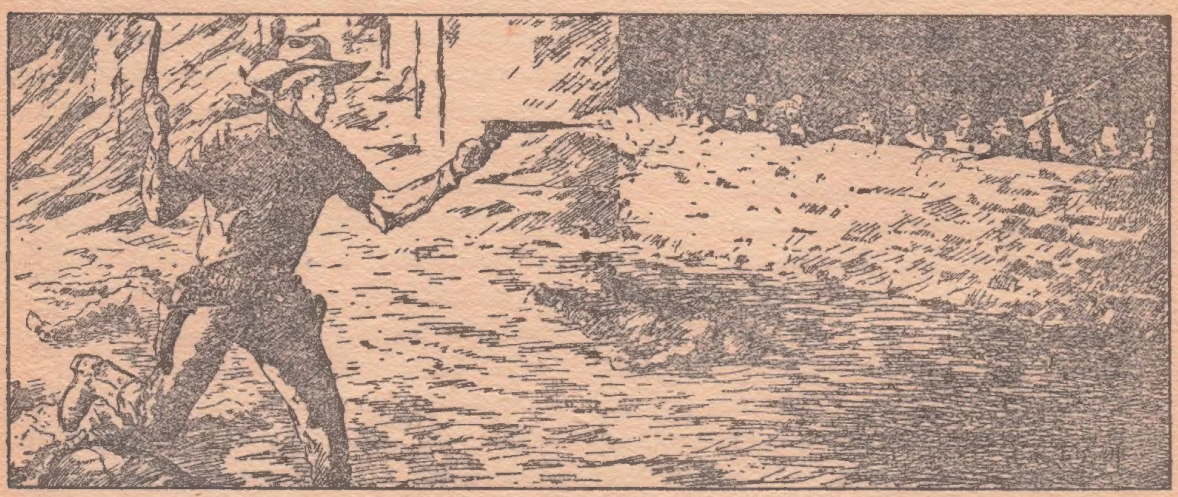
Roberts next pays price. Died gamely behind wall of ranch but took Constable Brewer with him. Billy through force of personality now heads McSween faction,—

July 1878 the Murphyites opened fire on McSween's home. Three blistering days Kid and his followers fought them.



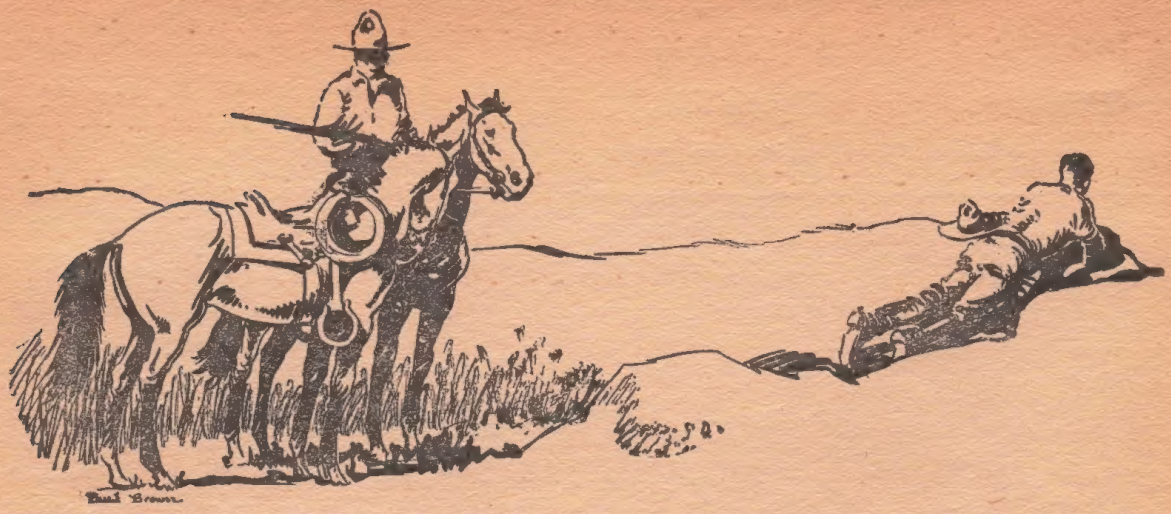
Sheriff Brady and Deputy Hindiman, killed by the Kid on way to open court, April 1, 1878.

Noon of third day came cavalry. Ostensibly neutral, commander made no move when Murphyites fired McSween home.



Then started worse killing of siege as men fled burning building. McSween, nerve gone, unarmed, was shot dead. Others dropped in flight. Lastly the Kid dashed the thirty foot open space, two six-guns blazing. Killed Deputy Beckwith, slayer of McSween. Wounded two more as twenty guns bellowed at him.

Goin' into the Wilderness to Meet Wolf



FREEZE-OUT

By FRIDTJOF MICHELSON

WHERE at one time Old Jason McCune's right arm had been, there now dangled an empty sleeve. It bloused loosely, the cuff tucked in the waistband of his belted jeans, eloquently proclaiming past hardships which were so plainly printed in the lines of the old man's face. Too, it was a symbol of the helplessness that Old Jason felt toward the tragic mysteries that in the last week had descended on the J Bar M.

"This thing has got the greasy, wooly stink of sheep, to me," Jason said, and the stub of his arm wagged reminiscently in the loose cloth at his shoulder.

It was in a sheep and cattle war, in nineteen ought nine, that he had lost his arm. A dum-dum bullet had smashed it mid-way between shoulder and elbow. And since that day, now twenty-six years past, Old Jason had watched the horizon with a wary eye, imagining every scud of cloud-wrack that crossed Eagle Nest divide to be sheep invading his precious range.

The old man's eyes glittered with recollection. Tawny eyes they were, like a fawn's, which, for all the maimed and weathered age of his body, still held in them a glint of youth. They contrasted strangely with the oatmeal-cookie texture of his skin, baked and browned in the oven-heat of summer suns.

He paused at a porch pillar, leaning a gaunt hand against it. And his eyes met the tawny dust of the yard, deepening the crow's-feet that encircled them. Out of the past came a vision of Ot Black, dwarfed of body and wizened of heart, his sage-green eyes glossed with hatred, who had led the sheep men in that memorable struggle.

According to tales borne back to him by roving waddies, Black was now living in Deadwood, a solitary, twisted figure whose brain seemed eternally to dwell on the bitter memory of defeat.

Old Jason suddenly stirred.

From the gravel of the river-crossing behind the stables he caught the sudden thud of hoofs. A streak of blurred movement erupted from the river rut and came galloping toward him. Two riders; no— Jason leaned his thighs against the railing as if to bring the objects within reach of

his failing vision—one rider, leading a saddled horse. Across the back of the unmounted horse hung a strange object, slicker-wrapped and limp. Dangling stirrups, flapping ends telegraphed a tragic message to the old man in advance.

In the saddle, he soon discovered, was his lanky and youthful foreman, Truman Bidwell. And inside that limp parcel was Homer, Truman's kid brother, who had just turned his nineteenth year.

For just an instant, anger flamed in Old Jason's eyes. Then immediately it was snuffed out by a memory more devastating than the grim reality before him.

"Scooty! Where was Scooty?"

That morning, as she often did, Scooty had gone with Homer after the horses. And Homer was strapped across the saddle, plain to be seen, dead.

SWIFTLY the young foreman reined his horse close to the porch railing and swung his leg over it. He bent over the stricken old man in the rocking chair and drew it sled-wise behind the climbing vines to screen the body from sight.

For Truman it was a three-fold tragedy that strangled the vibrancy of his strong shoulders. Homer dead—Scooty missing—Old Jason on the verge of collapse.

Truman had hardly realized until now how dreamless the world would be without Scooty. Through four long years he had planned, doggedly worked, for her. But now—— In June the blizzards of March were howling. And Scooty was out in it.

He found his voice on a low key, the straight line of his lips barely moving.

She went with Homer this morning after the horses——"

"Yes," echoed Old Jason, "she went with Homer after the horses." He hunched himself to the extreme edge of his chair. "The third one to go in a week," he said hollowly. "Where, Tru?" He pointed at the laden horse below the railing.

"Wind Caves," said Truman. "West end. Ground all churned up with tracks. Looked every place. Couldn't find her."

A dark silence, like night on a troubled sea, settled over them.

"Dad," said Truman at last, "we've come to the jumpin' off place." His gray eyes were drifting blotches of smoke, painted, if that were possible, with a hard, metallic substance. "This is where the J Bar M goes in for hell and leather."

Old Jason got suddenly to his feet, his bow-legs, like parentheses, enclosing an oval of daylight. Late years, with uncanny legerdemain, had padded the old man's girth with the flesh they had stolen from the fullness of his cheeks and the muscular rotundity of his legs. His booted feet beat an unsteady cadence on the boards.

"Son," he said, and a bony forefinger trembled in front of him, "I put you in as foreman because you understand my policies and was man enough to respect 'em. I'm not at all sure, after twenty-six years, that this is the time to take to the trails of outlawry again." Peace at any price had become Old Jason's credo since that turbulent day when his right arm had fallen in the dust at his feet. "I can't rightly allow men who work for me to repeat an act that I wouldn't repeat myself. "Life," he said, squinting philosophically, "is the wolf that followed the shorn lamb into the wilderness. Lookin' at it from where I stand today, I think I'd rather be the lamb than the wolf."

Bitterness burned on Truman's tongue. He wanted to spit words of fire and hatred. His fingers ached to clutch, his knuckles to batter. Even the unfeeling bore of his gun seemed to be filled with an itch for action.

"The shorn lamb," he said, "is in the wilderness now. Another one"—he jerked his head outward—"is strapped to the saddle yonder. And a third one," he said, tapping his own chest, "is goin' into the wilderness to meet the wolf."

"For twenty-six years," said Old Jason as if he had not heard, "the J Bar M has

lived under the smoke of the battle where eighteen men was killed. I don't rightly know but what we're payin' interest now. I bend my knees to a judgment that is bigger than mine." He raised his fist in sudden fury. "If my old head knew the name of the man that harmed Scooty," he cried, "I'd crush him as I would a scorpion and gladly pay the price of perdition. But innocent men will fall into the snare that's set for the guilty. Eighteen men died, but the greedy soul who started it all, for his own profit, still lives. No, son," he said, calming, "I don't know the answer. Peace and vengeance might be twins. But I, personally, will see to that. I can't rightly ask a man who works for me to suffer this." The stub of his arm wagged in the empty sleeve.

BITTERNESS, held in check by a pity that was bigger than courage, smeared itself across Truman's face. Sweat was visible below his hatband, and the taut muscles of his body seemed to make an evil humming in his ears.

"Then," said he, standing straight and ruddy against the morning sun, "the name of the J Bar M won't be brought into it. Headquarters for the manhunt I aim to start will be my own ranch over on First Creek. That's where Scooty and I planned to live, beginning this spring."

He turned away, but the usual spring of his walk was now like rubber that has lost most of its resiliency.

Truman was not a handsome man even in a happy mood. A strong, interesting face, rather too heavily wrought in the features that denoted its strength. People who met him for the first time instinctively liked him, and the demonstrative few who spoke their thoughts, said, "Son, I bet you ain't got an enemy in all the world."

But now, since death and misery had made him a partner, there was a sting in the glance of those gray eyes, a stolid fixity in the set of that strong jaw.

As he swung at a quartering angle from the river trail he flicked a swift glance at the slicker-wrapped burden in the saddle, and without realizing that he spoke aloud, he said:

"Maybe Old Jason is right—maybe man's score *is* to mourn."

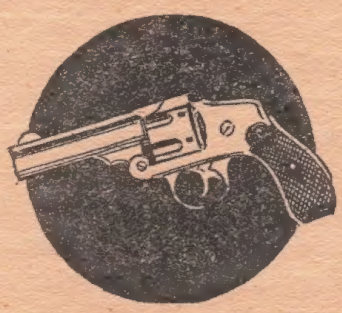
Then he lifted his eyes to Eagle Nest divide, yearning upward through a cobalt gloom to the sun. And in that moment he found again the feelings that had gone so starkly cold within him.

"I'll go back," he said, "and make it right with the old man—get the boys together from the hayin' camp."

Old Jason continued to fight the porch with his bootheels; fighting over again the battles of yester-year. Suddenly his mind was settled on a course of action. Leaving the door hanging wide, he entered the house; and from a bureau drawer he took an old frontier model .45 which had tasted no lead, no burst of muzzle flame since nineteen ought nine. Then he drew on his chaps and with one-handed awkwardness buckled the cartridge belt around his middle holding the buckle between hip and door jamb until he could catch the loose end and bring it around to fasten it.

"Don't make much difference about me," he muttered. "My boots is about wore out anyway."

Pulling his high-steepled hat over his eyes, he bow-legged to the door, and there



on the threshold, with doubt, disbelief, joy alternately swiveling in the deep lines of his face, he froze.

"In God's name!" he suddenly cried.

Across the ranch basin from the east came a running horse whose markings were as familiar to Old Jason as the back

of his own hand. In the saddle was a slim figure who lay across the horn in the manner of a jockey, hair streaming in the wind, tiny feet and elbows flicking in quick movements.

"In God's name!" he said again. "Scooty!"

AGE suddenly went out of those old legs as they ran swiftly down the steps. A streak of horseflesh, smelling strongly of lathered sweat, whisked past him as Scooty quit the saddle. In another instant she was clasped against Old Jason's ample girth with a single arm that was suddenly as strong as two. The buckle of his cartridge belt gouged them with painful pressure.

"Scooty—Scooty!" he mumbled into her hair.

Scooty shook his shoulders to release the pressure of his grip. "You're crushing me! I'm all right, Dad. Where's Truman?"

She punched her shirt back into her trousers and tucked her hair behind her ears. For a moment she stared at the belted gun, the high-steepled hat.

A miniature edition of Old Jason himself. The same tawny eyes, touched by a softness that was wholly feminine. Her hair, a deep brown—chestnut colored. Even in her present mussed-up state the curves of full-blown womanhood were noticeable under the even fit of her riding habit. A smooth, supple body, neither large nor small, that made one yearn to own it. Seeing her made it easy to understand Truman's savage affection.

Arm in arm they climbed the porch steps.

"There's a bad stink to all this, Scooty," her father said gravely. "The greasy, wooly stink of sheep—and Ot Black. Or else the hand of Providence is takin' back an eye for an eye for the old days." Bitterness chinked the deep lines of his face. "I don't rightly know, but it seems to me that a man like Young Homer more than pays the toll for the rapscallions that fought under Black. Do you think, Scooty, it was Black that done it?"

Scooty settled to the railing and crossed a booted foot over her knee. It was going to be extremely difficult to talk about.

"I went with Homer after the horses," she began, and the sound of her voice was reminiscent of a bell that has suddenly been cracked. "He didn't want me to go. He had a funny feeling, he said, that something was going to happen. I laughed at him, of course, but he kept saying all the way up to Wind Caves that it would kill Truman if something awful happened to me." She bit her lip to hold back emotions that sooner or later must gush forth. "We found the horses the first thing, on the other side of the caves. It was early so we—well we've done it lots of times—we started playing hide-and-seek there in the caves. You know, on horseback. Homer rode into one of the caves so he couldn't see which way I went, and I rode off to hide. Pretty soon I thought I heard him coming, so I spurred Topsy into a wind-scoop thinking I'd slip around the outside edge and come in free.

"Then, suddenly, just as if your gun would go off now, I heard a shot. Topsy bolted up the side of the gully before I could get her stopped, and when I looked around, instead of one rider, I saw two.

"I remembered what Homer had said and my heart jumped into my throat. As soon as I dared I rode around where we had parted. And there he was"—she dropped on her knees beside her father's chair and buried her face in his lap—"lying there in the sand—dead."

OLD JASON'S hand tenderly stroked her hair, but his slitted eyes roved over the thatched roofs of the sheds and stables and settled on the horizon where the hills dovetailed into the sky. No tenderness, no mercy anywhere in the mask-like parchment of his face.

"It was Ot Black," he said, "that done

it. Ot Black or some of his hirelings. Nobody else had a call to do such a thing."

"No," said Scooty, rearing up and drying her eyes. "No, it wasn't. I found out who it was. That's why I didn't get in sooner." It was easier now to talk; that suffocating tightness gone from her breast. "Skag Hillard and Dogy Martin of the Triple S.

"I followed them. Rode around to the far side of Teepee ridge and hid there until they came through the saddle. That's who it was—Skag Hillard and Dogy Martin."

"God's name," said Old Jason, and for a long moment he sat bereft of words. At last, "Then the Triple S is Black's outfit and they aim to freeze us out." A bony fist, because it had no palm to strike, smote his leathered thigh. "This," he said, using Truman's phrase, "is the jumpin' off place for the J Bar M. I'm through caterwauling about peace and the price of victory. With the small change that's left of my life I'm goin' out to pay the first instalment." He bent suddenly forward. "Scooty, are you sure nobody saw you ride away from Teepee ridge? As sure as they did there'll be a price on your head."

Scooty's reply hung stammeringly on her tongue. Her long curving lashes lowered.

"Yes, Dad—I'm sure." She left the sentence hanging there. "Where's Truman?"

Old Jason told her.

"I must see him!" She swung her booted feet over the railing and jumped. "How long since he left? I might catch up with him. I'll be back as soon as I can. Wait for me, Dad. I wanta go with you."

MISGIVINGS churned in Truman's thoughts when he saw an inverted comet of dust, undoubtedly raised by reckless riders, approaching him across the northern flat. Trouble or bad news usually accompanied so much commotion. The tragic bundle in the saddle was warning enough. Swiftly he swung to the left, climbing to the spine of the ridge to avoid unnecessary danger.

Skag Hillard and Dogy Martin of the Triple S materialized out of the dust-cloud. Neighbors, and so far as Truman knew, friends. But still Truman wondered at their strange maneuvers. Not until they had effectively cut in ahead of him, stemming all possibility of flight, did the riders pull their ponies to a slow jog.

"Howdy, Bidwell," said Hillard. He was a blocky-built man on whose ruddy jowls rode a look of sullen challenge. His voice had in it the harsh, booming quality of a braggart.

"Skag—Dogy," said Truman quietly. "What's the drive?"

A cunning secrecy lurked in the shadows of Hillard's brushy eyebrows. He jabbed a black-nailed forefinger at the dead man.

"Who?"

"Kid brother," said Truman succinctly.

"No!" cried Skag. "What——?"

"Shot. Wind Caves—this morning."

Skag rapped out a bitter oath.

"Now, by God, Truman," he said, "that gets me mad! Alone, was he?"

Truman sensed a double purpose behind this cross-examination, but no clear reason for it came to him.

"Scooty—Old Jason's daughter—was with him."

"Damnation! Girl get back all right, did she?"

Truman shook his head.

"Not when I left——"

A significant glance passed between

Skag and Dogy—a glance freighted with a guilty man's hope that he might yet undo a grievous error.

"By God, Truman," said Skag effusively, "it's a outrage. Whether or not that girl is harmed, figure on the Triple S for everything it's got."

He might indefinitely have blown threats against the enemy, made promises of Triple S fidelity, but Truman gathered up the reins and touched his horse with the spurs.

"Gotta get—him—in out of the sun."

The Triple S riders swung off the hog's back and struck a swift, angling course eastward. When they were well out of ear-shot Skag said to Dogy:

"Bidwell is a little addled in the head. He don't know how lucky he is. We might of put both the Bidwells in a double grave, but that can come later. It's the girl we want right now. Drygulch *her* and we're under cover again."

A grin, seemingly concocted of pain, spread across a face that was hardly distinguishable from dirty burlap. But no emotion showed in Dogy's unblinking blue eyes—eyes like two holes punched in a sack of indigo.

"God," he said, his voice rusty from disuse, "won't Black have burrs in his chaps if his five-year freeze-out scheme turns into a range war?"

Skag's beefy jowls shook darkly.

"We gotta muzzle that girl, that's all."

SCREENED from view by conveniently placed boulders, Skag Hillard crouched on one side of the trail, Dogy Martin on the other.

Scooty hardly had a chance. Coming at a swift clip as she dropped over the brow of the ridge she literally rode against the muzzles of two leveled guns.

"That's a nice girl," chanted Skag. "Paddy-cake just a little longer while I get your dam' gun. There now. We're goin' by-by."

For just an instant confusion and fright chained Scooty's tongue, but rebelliousness gleamed from those tawny eyes.

"Skag Hillard," she said, "you can't get away with this!" Then caution made her bite back the words that lay on her lips, aching to be said. They had seen her ride away from Teepee ridge, but they did not know, and must not know, she had talked to her father since they last saw her.

Dogy, suddenly disappearing, came from a washout with their horses, his slouching figure throwing shadows like the silhouette of an ape.

Hazing Scooty between them, they angled down the slope and followed a trail along the trough of the canyon. In a few minutes they rose again to a rimrock ledge against which their horses' hoofs beat with sharp concussion. Around them now, in the glare of a late afternoon sun, the brown hills lay like monstrous buffaloes lounging out their noon hour.

Skag twisted in the saddle, his sullen countenance hard-set.

"Snoopin'," he said, "ain't appreciated at the Triple S. Where'd you go this morning after you spied on us?"

Scooty rode on, thinking her own thoughts, as if she had not heard.

They entered the Triple S ranch basin by a little-used trail that came in behind the ranchhouse.

"Keep her under your muzzle," said Skag to Dogy, "while I sharpen the knives and cleavers." The door banged shut behind him.

The blonde woman lying on the bed in the adjoining room threw her arms wide and let a paper-backed novel fall to her bosom when Skag entered.

"Hello, darling," she said in a low, husky voice. "God, this is a good book. Kiss me."

Skag shushed her with a shake of his head and the girl sat up, wide-eyed with amazement.

At first glance hers was a pert, baby-dollish face, lighted by eyes that burned

blue and low, and framed by a tousel of cream-colored curls. Revealed at second glance was a bitterness half-hidden by the artificial redness of her lips, the mascarraed darkness of her lashes. She was of the type who followed the miners to the Klondike during the days of the gold rush.

Briefly Skag sketched their predicament. He said:

"We got the girl out here now—ready for the grave of a desert rat." His thumb jerked in the general direction of Eagle Nest, beyond which stretched the brown sands of Sandora desert. "If she hasn't already squawked, which I don't think she has, we can still cover up."

The blonde's smudged eyelids tightened.

"So what?"

"You'll have to be the decoy, Maud." He patted her shoulder. "Here's the way we work it. We all ride together to the Forks—the Triple S gang and Old Jason's daughter. Beyond the Forks we split. Two of us ridin' northeast into the hills, two of us across Lone Pine Pass into Sandora.

"Two-three days out there and nobody'll know Miss McCune from a dried herring. No bullet holes, no nothing. Just naturally rode into the desert—got lost—died. We'll stop at the store and make sure Clem Stuart sees us. He'll squirt tobacco juice and information all over anybody that inquires about us.

"Take along an extra change of clothes, Maud. Another little scheme. Tell you about that later. Not our fault that Miss Scooty got sore and rode off alone, is it?" He shrugged. "No *sabe*—no spick English——"

"Marvelous, Skag!" applauded the blonde. She leaped up from the bed, making hasty preparations. "Maybe the hussy won't be so high-hat after this."

"Not so likely," said Skag, "but hurry, Maud. Never can tell who's snoopin' around. Snoopin'—that's what got us into this mess." His big body swayed importantly toward the stable to get Maud's horse.

"ONE false move," warned Skag as they dismounted in front of Clem Stuart's store, "and you'll find yourself in a dog-pile with Clem, on the floor."

Scooty moved into the store as if in a nightmare. So close to rescue, and yet so far, she thought. She smiled genially at Clem.

"Bless my soul," said the old storekeeper, wringing one handle of his mustache. "Miss Scooty—an' the Triple S." He didn't speak to the blonde, and it seemed to cut her deeply. "Did the gov'mint give you Injuns permission to

leave the reservation?" He slapped his thigh and sent a spray of tobacco juice across the counter. "You shore do come when you take a notion, don'tcha?"

"Yuh," said Skag. "Gimme six packets of Bull. Dogy wants somethin', too."

With concentration that was almost hypnotic Scooty watched her old friend fumble the purchases into striped paper bags.

"Clem," she said suddenly, "is my credit good here? I came away without a cent, and I don't like Bull, or any of the things Dogy is buying. You know what I like, Clem."

"Bless my soul," said Clem. "You can have the store. Why, a-course I know what you like—seedless raisins! Oughta know, been a-sellin' 'em to yuh since you was knee-high to a tadpole."

The package of raisins in her hand,

Scooty glided smoothly out the door that Skag held open for her.

When Dogy had crammed his crackers and bologna, cheese and bottled soft drink into his saddle pockets, they all mounted and set out again on the ride that was to be Scooty's last.

A short way up the trail Skag called the party to a halt, crowding close to the big blonde.

"This," he said in a low voice, "is where you go into your act. Take her down in the washout yonder and switch clothes with her. It might muddle the searchin' party if someone sees Miss McCune's *ridin' habit* travelin' in the opposite direction than she is goin' herself. Dogy and me'll stay here. Yell if she starts anything."

"Pooh!" said the blonde with infinite disgust. "Come along. You won't see nothin' you haven't seen before. She might as well get used to it. They don't wear clothes in heaven."

Dogy's unaccustomed eyes glittered at the sight of half-nude femininity. His nails bit deep into his palms.

Scorn trembled on the big blonde's lips.

"Well," she rasped, standing skin-tight in Scooty's clothes, "what next?"

Skag's ample paunch shook with silent laughter.

"Get on," he said, if you can do it without rippin' your britches——"

Scooty, in the baggy garments of the blonde, continued to munch raisins as if this ludicrous pageant had entirely missed her. Her thoughts clung tenaciously to the pin-prick of light she seemed to see through this dark predicament.

"When she begins to cry for water," scoffed the blonde as they rode away, "feed her another raisin. Very moistening, they say."

OLD JASON stood leaning against the porch railing, his eyes almost swallowed by the crow's-feet that clutched at them, as Truman rode up.

"Where's Scooty?" he cried.

"That's what I wish we both knew, Dad," said Truman, "and that's what I aim to find out. I'll find her if I have to level off every knoll in the Grand River brakes with gun-lead."

"Didn't you meet her on the trail?" shouted Old Jason. "She was home—and went again to meet *you!*"

"Here!" cried Truman. "After I left——?"

"That's what I'm sayin'!" Daylight flashed between Old Jason's legs as he strode down the porch. "They've got her this time, Tru. They've got her sure. She knows who killed Homer. Saw 'em do it—followed 'em."

There was something of a bleat in Truman's voice.

"Who—?"

"Skag Hillard and Dogy Martin!" Old Jason launched a scurrilous attack against Ot Black. "It's that renegade that's behind it, or I'll pay perdition for lyin'——"

"Skag Hillard and Dogy Martin!" In swift retrospect Truman understood the meaning of their cross-examination. He braced his hand against the porch railing and vaulted over it.

"Hold on!" cried Old Jason. "I'm goin' too." Swiftly he bow-legged to the barn to get his horse.

"River trail?"

"No," barked Old Jason. "Took the hill trail, she did."

An hour later they came upon the spot where Scooty's suddenly checked horse had scarred the hard-packed ground.

"Here's where they overhauled her," Truman said bitterly.

"They got her all right, Dad."

But though they followed the trail with the skill of Piute scouts they lost it on the rimrock ledge where not even the flintiest hoofs could leave a mark.

"Professional killers," said Old Jason hollowly, "have a way of coverin' their tracks.

A mile or so beyond Clem Stuart's gen-

eral merchandise store, Truman and Jason dismounted. Old Clem, his mustache sagging like a piece of tarred rope pinned to a gray canvas, had told them everything.

Truman was on hands and knees now, miscroscopically examining the wagon rut. Savage excitement suddenly rang in his throat:

"Raisins! Raisins!"

Old Jason glared at him, thoughts of insanity leaping into his eyes. Then he, too, saw the sprinkling of wrinkled fruit beside the wagon rut. Into his thoughts burst a vision of a little girl with a red ribbon in her hair, eating raisins with fingers that had but a short time before been mixing mud pies.

"In God's name," he said at last, "we're on the trail, Tru!"

Bent almost double, his eyes examining every grass-blade, Truman darted to the side of the trail. Again he was on his knees, muttering, nodding.

At that moment a rider came over a bulge in the trail and drew rein beside Old Jason. It was Hank Mulkey, a lean-faced, wind-whipped puncher from the Flying V.

"What yuh doin'?" he yelled at Truman. "Catchin' ants?"

Old Jason barked at him:

"Did you see anything of Scooty?"

"Scooty?" said the rider. "Yeah—over on Bald Eagle. Her and Skag Hillard. Waved at me from the ridge. Why?"

"Huh!" said Old Jason, leaning from the saddle, his arm-stub wagging like a terrier's tail.

"Couldn't mistake her at that distance—that beer-colored shirt and that flashy scarf."

"Truman!" cried Old Jason. "Hank seen 'er over on Bald Eagle—ridin' with Skag Hillard—"

But Truman now stood rooted above the thing he had found in the grass, doubt, fear, indecision using his face for a battleground. Did Skag Hillard know Scooty's fondness for raisins? Was this a ruse to lead the credulous down a false trail? Had Hank Mulkey actually seen her over on Bald Eagle?

"No!" he suddenly blurted. "No!"

In a leap he was in the saddle, spurring down an overgrown buffalo trail that led toward Lone Pine Pass and away from Bald Eagle. Shouting protest, Old Jason rode after him.

The Flying V waddie spat once in the dust, shrugged, and rode on about his own business.

After scrutinizing a long stretch of barren trail and finding no more sign, Truman reined in. Only the thoughtfully twitching eyes in that face seemed young and alive now. The rest was as a mask hewn in the bark of a dead cottonwood.

"How could she be in this direction," accused Old Jason, "when Mulkey seen her over on Bald Eagle?"

Without lifting his eyes, Truman shook his head. Those raisins, tantamount, in his mind, to Scooty's own signature. On the other hand, so was that beer colored shirt, as Mulkey called it; and that flashy scarf which he himself had given her.

For a moment, under the baleful impatience of Old Jason's glare, Truman sat drumming the pommel of his saddle. Then he spurred on again in the same direction they had been riding.

In the tall grass through which they traveled no fresh sign was found to reassure them, had, indeed, any been left. But Truman's mind was made up. Though Scooty's life depended on his decision, and though all that life meant to him depended on the outcome, he rode steadfastly forward.

As they climbed the slope of Lone Pine Ridge, from the peak of which the trail fell again into Sandora desert, Truman read the ground in front of them until the hillside trembled under his concentrated gaze.

At the summit they found a suspicion of a hoof-print in a patch of swirling sand. That was all.

Below them now stretched Sandora desert, heat waves beating upward from the far side of it, sunset writhing along its ribbed sand like a myriad copper snakes. A hot wind swept across it, funneling through the pass, as if from a smelting furnace.

Scanning the desert's grim face for a moment, they plunged on again, down the zigzag trail, into the shifting sands, wind and darkness rapidly obliterating the tracks they left behind.

THE desert twilight wove its spell over the sand, and a remnant of day, like an indirect lighting system, cast mellow, twisting shadows across Scooty's face. Leaning on one elbow she lay on a little mound, her smooth body stretched at full length.

Sitting cross-legged in front of her, his gross face even more distorted by the evening shadows, sat Dogy Martin. He gnawed on a stick of bologna which he peeled as he would a banana, a box of crackers wedged between his thighs, a bottle of soft drink stuck in the sand beside him.

Alone here on the desert with this beautiful girl, Dogy was emboldened to the point of speech:

"When the horses finished with their oats," he said, grinning crookedly, "we ride on to the dunes." But that was not the thought uppermost in his mind. The sunset hour, with its light and shadow, was a thing apart from Dogy. A dwarfed and pitiful thing was his understanding of romance. A thing gained by advantage rather than by finesse or mutual regard.

He rolled the bologna back into its greasy paper, closed the lid of the cracker box and stood up dusting crumbs from his chaps.

Scooty was quick to see the molten glow that kindled in those dull eyes. She pivoted swiftly toward him, her elbow burrowing a hole in the sand. Clearly she saw her position; saw that something tactful was required on her part.

"Dogy," she said, smiling up at him, "sit down, let's talk."

"Tired of settin'," said Dogy sullenly.

Scooty's pulse ticked audibly in her temples.

"Why don't you be nice," she said, "and give me some dinner?"

In a few words Dogy laid bare his single-tracked desire.

"What'll you gimme if I do? Besides—tain't orders."

Slowly Scooty pulled herself to her feet.

"Isn't this a beautiful night, Dogy? Listen, Dogy, I've always been very fond of you, and I never could understand why you didn't like me. I've always wanted us to be friends. Now that we have the opportunity, why don't we get acquainted? If you just wanted to, we could do all sorts of nice things together."

Dogy was not to be dissuaded. All the starved emptiness of his soul had drawn to a focal point. The music of Scooty's voice set hammers pounding in his brain, brought an apoplectic glow to his coarse cheeks.

"Like what?" he said. "What would we do?"

"Well, for instance," said Scooty, struggling to turn defeat to temporary victory, "we could come out here and watch the sunset, see the stars come out, and the moon come up over Eagle Nest. Look, Dogy, see the first star of evening up there—how pale and lonesome it looks? And look back there, Dogy. See the blue shadows crowding in between the hills as if they wanted to be tucked in for the night?"

Accustomed to obeying, Dogy followed her pointing finger, his loose mouth hanging open as he searched the heavens for eve's lone star. Then, suddenly, as he turned half about to see the blue shadows, a whole constellation burst before his eyes. His hanging jaw snapped shut on his tongue as he staggered backwards.

Like a terrier after a wolf, Scooty was on him, her tiny, balled fists flashing in his face. But the strength of that emaciated body had been deceptive. It caught balance and lunged viciously toward her. Hands powered by madness clutched her shoulders and flung her violently sidewise. They toppled together into the sand.

No use to match strength with a force that was wrenching her arm from its socket. Her free hand groped at Dogy's hip for his gun. But Dogy's thumb had found her throat—pressing the eyes from her head, the tongue from her mouth. She felt the full weight of his body fall on her, then, suddenly, a clement darkness settled over her eyes.

WHEN consciousness returned to Scooty she found herself lying with her head pillowed on a leathered thigh. A hand was stroking her forehead tenderly. Her long, curving lashes swung upward and she looked gratefully into the haggard face of her father. Perspiration was running down his lined cheeks like water in an irrigation system.

"Take it easy, Scooty," he said gently. "Everything's all right. We've got the beast hog-tied like a pig at a barbeque. Nicked Truman's side with a bullet, but not serious. It's Ot Black, Scooty, that's behind it all." His tone seemed to gratify all his years of suspicion. "Dogy squealed —told everything. It was Hillard that killed Homer. The Triple S is Black's outfit. Tryin' to freeze the J Bar M out." His tired eyes bit down at the corners while for a long minute he looked off across the moonlit desert. "I never thought I'd live to see the day when Ot Black got his just deserts. But the day has come, Scooty. Ot Black will pay perdition for his sins. A telegram from Sheriff Rickhart to the authorities at Deadwood will settle the account in full. And Hillard, too, will do the limber-legged dance right alongside of him. Rickhart'll have him in the net two hours after we give the word. The book is closed," he said, "as soon as justice has been served."

Truman, shoving his warm-barreled gun back in the holster, dropped suddenly on his knees beside Scooty and took both her hands. His face was drawn from the gruelling ordeal, but his eyes were bright with new hope and a memory.

"Scooty," he said tenderly, "spring has come again." He bent to press a kiss on her lips.

"My blessing," said Old Jason the stub of his arm nodding with his head. "After twenty-six years of trouble, now we can have peace."

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IT'S HELL TO BE A RANGER

By CADDO CAMERON

Author of That Other Thriller about Blizzard and Badger, "Rangers Is Powerful Hard to Kill"

SOMETHING ABOUT THE STORY AND WHAT HAS HAPPENED BEFORE

CAPTAIN HENRY CLAY HOUSTON, Commanding Company X, Texas Rangers, sat in his tent on the banks of the Nueces and read a telegram.

The message scarcely merited that title, since it had traveled by horseback, stage, telegraph wires, star mail route, and horseback again; but it deserved attention because signed by a man whom he had known for years, a man who would be the last person on earth to call for help.

The communication was from Trinity Joe Slocum, manager of Miss Belle Ransom's great Box J outfit in Whirlwind County, and it read:

"Old Satan is runnin' wild on this here range, and the Good Lord has done took to the tall timber. Send a army."

So he sent Badger Coe and Blizzard Wilson.

Men Is Like Trail Herds. You Can't Never Tell What They're a-Fixin' to Do Next—Especially Women

PART II

The Rangers travel as two outlaws, Buffalo and Pelican, and go to Whirlwind to size up the situation. They round up the marshal first and judge him to be crooked, but they don't know that behind the scenes is a woman, one whose enmity they had aroused in other days and whose one thought is revenge. She calls herself "Miss Constance," and owns the Wild Rose Saloon and Dancehall, but runs plenty else besides. It is she who is back of the attack on the Ransom ranch, because she's jealous of the absent owner, Belle. She eggs on Carlos, one of her killers, to get rid of Blizzard and Badger, and they sense the play. "I shore as hell wish I knowed who sicked him on to us," mutters Blizzard.

Chapter IV

THEN HE SHOVELLED ASHES ONTO THE BLOOD

KING STANNARD jerked his head around quickly, and looked keenly at the Ranger. He started to say something, but apparently thought better of it and kept silent until they covered the short distance to the corral.

Having put up their horses, they started walking back to town. Badger had some-

thing on his mind and figured he might as well get shed of it before going any further.

Stopping at a point where they were not likely to be overheard, he called a halt. "Hold on a minute, fellas." Hands on his hips, he cocked his head to one side and asked quietly, "Sheriff, if you don't mind sayin', how come that there Buffalo and Pelican break you made back yander?"

Stannard tried to look innocent. "Why, those are your names aren't they?"

Folks who knew him well, declared that Badger could act the part of a bad-man better than the wickedest gunman that ever blazed his way across the country. Standing with feet spread, he thrust his head slightly forward and answered with slumbering belligerence, "I ain't sayin'. But far as you and the balance of this here Whirlwind country is consarned, we're Badger Coe and Blizzard Wilson. And it won't be noways healthy for nobody to forgit it, neither."

To Badger's great surprise, the pudgy sheriff stood his ground; but nevertheless, he was inclined to be cordial. "I don't give a damn what you fellows call yourselves," he retorted with a friendly smile. "Next thing we know, you'll be swearing to God you're Rangers, but that won't bother us in the least."

His smile became even more friendly. "We'll hang you if we think you need it, providing Carlos lets you live that long."

Blizzard's high-pitched voice broke in lazily, "I ain't a-hankerin' to start no argyment, Sheriff, but jest for curiosity's sake I'd sorta like to know how you come to figger we was Buffalo and Pelican."

Stannard's round face was the picture of good nature. He glanced humorously from Blizzard to Badger and said, "I had the pleasure of talking to a fellow who knows you, and he swears you're Buffalo and Pelican."

"Where is he?" snapped Badger.

King took off his derby hat and carefully brushed its crown with a sleeve, using a circular motion. "That poor fellow left town on the run. He said you're gunning for him."

Badger wondered whether Stannard was lying, and he saw that Blizzard felt the same way about it.

But the sheriff hadn't finished. "Furthermore, if a man ever sets eyes on you two wildcats, he'll never forget you. While at the Border on business some time ago, you were pointed out to me by a horse thief who told me a lot about you. For some reason I didn't recognize you when I saw you riding down the street today, but now I know I'm not mistaken."

The little politician had the knack of making his words ring true, but Badger still was more than half convinced that he had been listening to a pack of lies. Any way he looked at it, the situation had his brain in a whirl; so he decided to forget it, and keep a sharp lookout for Red.

Blizzard's mind wasn't in a whirl, but his thoughts were tearing through his head so fast they tromped on one another's heels. Assuring himself that Stannard was one of the smoothest men he had met in a long time, he didn't believe a word the little cuss said. Furthermore, he was confident that King had been posted by someone who knew entirely too much about Badger and him; a decidedly uncomfortable feeling, to say the least. Who this mysterious person might be, and how to smoke him out was the question.

THIS problem occupied Blizzard's mind while the sheriff led them to Grandma Carson's hotel and restaurant a short distance beyond the Canadian; and he was still thinking about it when he ambled in behind his companions, laid his rifle across a vacant chair beside him, and sat down next to Badger at the long table.

They had the room to themselves, and he wished it were otherwise. A man could gather information as well as grub at a crowded table. He took occasion to note that there was a solid wall behind them; but directly across the table, in the opposite side of the room, was an open window. He didn't like the idea, but it was either that or have a window at their backs.

By the time they got their feet under the table and their hats under their chairs, a girl came in from the kitchen with a steaming dish of Irish potato soup.

The sheriff introduced her as Mary Carson, Mrs. Carson's granddaughter. She smiled at the Rangers—particularly Badger—in a way that works no injury to the face of a pretty brunette with lively eyes and a generous mouth with happy corners.

After placing the dish on the table before him, Mary returned to the kitchen. The big devil watched her all the way to the door, then he reached for the soup.

And when she returned with a great platter of fried chicken, he opened a conversation. Blizzard listened with amusement, although his jovial pardner's remarks were virtually repetitions of things he had heard the rascal say to many other girls in widely scattered places. Somehow or other, Badger managed to give the impression that he ate only because she brought him the food, while in fact eating like a horse.

In addition to the distraction provided by Mary and her admirer, there was a red-and-white checked oiled cloth so heavily burdened with tempting victuals as temporarily to attract the interest of a hungry man away from more important matters; not to mention a sociable sheriff who talked a blue streak.

So Blizzard momentarily forgot his problem.

But his watchful eyes never strayed very far away from that open window.

Having diligently worked on the soup, he drifted a parcel of fried chicken over the rim of the platter onto his plate, and sent a long arm out to gather a bowl of creamy gravy. Then he blended the gravy with the chicken, and told Badger to shove the sweet potatoes along. He managed to do a little thinking about the situation while blending the sweet potatoes with the chicken and gravy, and gazing reflectively at a mountain of fluffy mashed spuds with butter overflowing the crater at its summit.

That window ought to be shut. Had no screen and was letting in a lot of bugs.

No two ways about it, thought Blizzard, there was someone in Whirlwind who knew Badger and him—certainly as Buffalo and Pelican, and possibly as Rangers. And he'd gamble that person sicked Carlos onto them. No telling who it was. Might be this foxy little sheriff, or that spooky looking Professor, or——

His glance darted to the window. Dog or cat or somethin' a-rustlin' the weeds out there. During a lull in the conversation, he heard it but couldn't see it.

He figured he could make room on his plate for the spuds. Funny how much a fella could corral on his plate when he was good and hungry. Even found an empty patch where he could drop a spoonful of wild plum preserves.

Black as hell outside. A man was a damned fool to sit smack in front of an open window in strange country.

WHEN she wasn't bringing in more food, Mary ranged pretty close to the table. Before long, she and King got into a hot discussion of mutual shortcomings. Badger happily poured oil on the fire at every opportunity. Blizzard ate in silence, thinking that his pardner never worried much about anything—mysterious persons, or open windows, or nothin'.

Holding a chicken bone in midair, he solemnly inspected it with the air of a

man proud of work well done. The bone was on a line with the window. He looked past it, and——

He literally hurled his body against Badger!

They crashed to the floor together. From the middle of a tangle of arms and legs and chairs and dishes, plus chicken and gravy and hot coffee, burst a string of mighty curses. Badger had cut loose in earnest. Mary and Stannard stared in amazement at the two Rangers. Grandma came out of the kitchen on the run.

Blizzard got up almost immediately, but Badger needed more time to unsnarl himself.

"What the—hallelujah got into you?" he bellowed. "Jest look at me! Ain't I a mess?"

"Shore! You allus been," snapped Blizzard. "Looky yander."

Directly back of his chair, a knife was driven into the boards!

Grandma and Mary burst into excited speech, but King Stannard behaved as though he considered attempted assassinations no cause for excitement. Blizzard concluded that this little politician was more of a man than appearances indicated.

Badger growled, "It wa'n't comin' in my direction. Why in blazes did you fall on me all spraddled out?"

Blizzard watched the sheriff, and curtly answered, "I seen the steel and a black arm go up for the throw. That's all. Didn't know who the skunk was aimin' at. Might've been you."

"You knowed durned well it was you," rumbled Badger. "They ain't nobody out to stick me, and everybody knows you got it comin'."

Blizzard said nothing, busily examining the knife without removing it from the wall. The others gathered around him. Stannard reached for the weapon, but the Ranger stopped him.

"Hold on a minute."

Whipping out his own knife, he put a nick in the razor edge of the other blade showing the exact depth it drove into the wood. Then he jerked it out and balanced it studiously in the palm of his hand.

"Mmmm-m-m. Fine steel. Ain't a workin' knife. Hefts 'bout like mine. Reckon I better try somethin'."

The others watched and listened attentively. He flipped the blade into the floor a number of times, and snapped it across the table into the opposite wall.

His throwing motion was so expertly timed as to appear effortless, but the steel flickered through the air with tremendous speed and force.

Recovering the knife he observed, "Balanced mighty nigh the same as mine. Reckon I sorta got the feel of it." He turned to Mary. "Could you gimme a piece of paper—say 'bout six inches square, please ma'am?"

She went after the paper.

LOOKING neither right nor left, speaking to no one, Ta-nah silently stalked through the front door and on to the kitchen with a tray of dishes. She returned behind Mary, and went out with the same noiseless stride and aloof bearing.

Blizzard took the paper.

"Who's that there squaw?" he demanded sharply.

"That's Ta-nah," answered the girl. "She's Miss Constance's woman. Miss Constance had her supper sent over tonight."

He went to the wall and found the place where the knife struck. Then he took a pin from the lapel of his vest and

fastened the paper so as to cover the board around the gash.

Swinging about and starting for the door, he told them, "Wish you-all would jest stay here and keep away from that there winder. I ain't none too sartin with a strange pig-sticker like this'n."

Badger watched him disappear, then turned to the others with a proud grin. "Ain't that there lazy-lookin' cuss the fastest critter you ever seen when he gits a-goin'?" The way he tumbled out'n his cheer onto me would've made triple-distilled chain lightnin' look plumb slow."

The others agreed. Mary spoke up, "What's he going to do now?"

"The Lawd only knows," manfully lied Badger. "You jest cain't never tell what he's fixin' to do. But I'll betcha a stack of blues that befo' long he knows the brands and marks and color of the polecat that throwed the knife." He shrugged and added with a sour grin, "Course the old reprobate won't never let on."

Stannard looked thoughtful. "I'm afraid he's going to a lot of trouble for nothing. Whoever did the throwing is a mile from here by now."

Badger flared up. "Mebbe you jest waller in the shade and switch at flies when some fella tries to knife you, but me and him is a heap different. We go git the coyote, regardless!"

Instantly King was all smiles again. "That's the very thing to do, and I'll help you all I can."

As he went through the door, Blizzard admitted to himself that he was glad it happened. Maybe he'd learn something from this knife throwing.

He could trail like an Apache, for he had learned to read sign in the days when—as old timers said—"A man's hair is tied to his brains." But when his eyes became accustomed to the darkness, they met with disappointment. The empty ground outside was stony hard and covered by a tangle of knee-high weeds and grass, some of which were dead and brittle—the remainder being more or less green. The green stuff that was mashed down but not broken, was slowly coming back to its normal position. He quickly gave up hope of finding clearly defined footprints; but with the aid of matches, he did succeed in tracing the passage of someone from the sidewalk to a point opposite the window. From there the party evidently sprang to the wall near the window, crept under it, and continued on close to the building until he reached its corner at the sidewalk. The nearest store was some distance away from that side of the hotel, so the prowler might easily escape observation while going through these maneuvers.

NEAR the sidewalk grew a comparatively high patch of weeds and grass that was crushed, suggesting that the would-be assassin might have crouched there. For a few moments the Ranger puzzled over it, then cursed softly and returned to the place from which the knife was thrown.

Blizzard's remarkable length of arm and the powerful snap he could impart with his steely fingers and wrist, enabled him to throw a knife with more force than that attained by any man against whom he had ever competed. He was about to make this test for purposes of comparison. If the knife struck the square of paper, it would drive into wood of approximately the same texture as it did when thrown by the unknown knifer; so by comparing the depths it penetrated, he could draw conclusions regarding the physique of the thrower. He knew that none other than someone who considered himself expert would hope to deliver a vital wound at that distance.

Standing with feet spread and the weapon in his right hand, he estimated the distance to the paper on the wall. His arm whipped up across his chest, bringing his hand above his left shoulder, and

he made a back-handed throw through the window. The knife was no more than a writhing, glittering streak of steel.

It nailed the target to the board.

When he returned to the dining room, Stannard and the women were staring at the knife and shaking their heads.

"I've seen knife throwing in my day, but never anything like this," enthusiastically declared the sheriff. "Twenty-five feet if it's an inch."

Badger winked at Grandma and Mary. "Only fair-to-middlin', I'd say. Didn't ketch more'n a inch of the paper. Oughta done a heap better, figgerin' the time he puts in a-practicin'."

Intent upon what he was doing, Blizzard ignored his talkative partner. He again marked the blade and pulled it out of the heavy pine board. A glance showed that it had penetrated almost twice as far as it did before.

Turning to King, he spoke with his usual lazy drawl. "Sheriff, I'd ruther you didn't put yo'self out to round up the cuss that tried to git me. But you got a right to know what I done figgered out about him. He had on a black, or leastwise a powerful dark shirt without no stripes or checks. His arms is long, but not as long as mine. He's tall, but shorter'n me. He ain't as stout as you'd calc'late a man of his size oughta be, jedgin' by how hard the knife hit. He's sly as a lobo, and slippery as a Injun."

He thought for a moment, then concluded dryly, "Reckon they ain't more'n a hundred men 'round here that them things will fit."

King laughed. "Yes, Whirlwind County breeds tall men and sells lots of shirts in solid colors."

"Sartinly!" concurred Badger. "Don't you go to no bother, Stannard. While me and him is a-scoutin' 'round for a pair of jobs, we can sorta keep a eye peeled. It'll give him somethin' to think about."

A hearty voice came rolling in from the porch. "Howdy folks! Can a hongry man git a mouthful?"

Jake Rupper lounged in the doorway, one hand preening his mustache. His lanky body seemed to fill the opening from top to bottom, leaving plenty of space on either side.

Somehow Blizzard got the swift impression that the man had been listening.

"Come in and set!" said Grandma, her tight lips biting off the words and her sharp, blue eyes snapping. "We'll feed a hongry man any time, day or night."

Apparently Jake's keen little eyes saw no one but Mary. He smiled at her in a way that evidently was meant to be devastating. She took one look at him. She turned on her heel and went to the kitchen.

The snap gave away to a twinkle in Grandma's eyes.

King Stannard promptly made the introduction in his grand style. "Gentlemen, this is Mister Jake Rupper, one of our prominent citizens and business men. He owns the C Bar N, a cow ranch that perhaps ranks second to none in Texas."

BLIZZARD made a note of the fact that the sheriff didn't take trouble to tell Jake who they were.

Rupper shook hands cordially, calling them by their right names, and they adjourned to the table. The newcomer coiled down on a chair across from the Rangers and started a lively conversation.

Everybody fell to eating. Nothing was said about the knife-throwing incident. Presently Mary came in with the coffee pot. With the assurance of a man who knew he was good, Jake met her with a flurry of more or less familiar badinage. She replied curtly and caustically, and thereafter attentively waited upon Badger to the exclusion of everyone else—particularly Jake.

Blizzard grinned into his plate.

Badger expanded noticeably, and Rupper didn't seem to mind.

As the meal wore on to a conclusion, Blizzard had to admit that the fellow's rollicking good nature made it hard to dislike him, regardless of his dandified dress and the faint odor of perfume which the Ranger's keen nose detected. Since the man was obviously somebody on this range, he figured it might be a good idea to cultivate his acquaintance; and he wasn't at all displeased to see that Badger and Jake were getting along beautifully. In fact—Rupper said he could use a couple of good hands at top wages, and Badger promised to ride down and look over the C Bar N.

Blizzard wanted to find out more about Ta-nah and her mistress. During a momentary lull in the conversation, he inquired carelessly, "Is that there Miss Constance crippled or somethin' so she has to send her squaw out for grub?"

"Not at all," replied Stannard. "I suppose she was too busy to get away from the Wild Rose."

"Does she always eat here?"

It was Jake who answered. "Mostly she eats at home. She's got her a house of her own and a colo'd gal to do the cookin', but it's purty well filled up right now."

"Company, huh?"

"Hardly that," drawled Jake with a grin. "I'd call 'em feeders. A ox of a Dutchman and his woman and fo' young'uns."

"Sorta fattenin' 'em up for beef, is she?" soberly wondered Badger. "Beef must be all-fired scarce 'round here. I ain't never et no Dutch meat, but meat is meat so I reckon it'd be fit to chaw."

Everybody laughed. For the fourth time, Mary filled Badger's coffee cup.

RUPPER continued. "Yes sah, fellas—that there Miss Constance is allus doin' somethin' for somebody. The durned fool Dutchman thought he could make a livin' on these here prairies with a plow and a hoe, so he traipses 'way out here a-totin' his folks along. You know what a fust-rate cow country does to fellas with sech crazy idees. Anyhow—Old Mother Nature up and warped it to the pore cuss good and proper, and his woman took down with somethin', and they was in a dickens of a pickle. So Connie—that's Miss Constance—she hears about it and sends a bunch of the boys out to where they was a-nestin', and moved 'em into town. And what does she do but up and git out'n her own house so's to make room for the Dutchman and his sick woman and them hongry-lookin' chillun. The young'uns has a starvin' dawg, and she even makes shore it's took keer of."

"I'll swan!" ejaculated Badger. "What is she figgerin' to do with 'em?"

"Ship 'em back East where they belong," replied Jake. "Miss Constance allows that soon as ever the woman can hit the trail, she'll send the whole kaboodle to the railroad and put 'em on the keers with they bellies full, and clothes on they backs and money in they pockets."

"Never heard the beat of it," declared Badger. "It's shore surprisin' doin's for a woman in her business."

"Wouldn't say that it is," drawled Blizzard, and immediately he became the center of attention. "Some sinners jest dotes on punishin' theyselves for they own shortcomin's, and we all seen folks a-makin' up to one fella for the dirt they done to another'n—sorta easin' they consciences, I reckon."

He paused to inspect the end of his cigarette. Smoke curled out of his long nose. "I allow men is like trail herds. You cain't never tell what they're a-fixin' to do next—'specially wimmin."

Mary made a face at him. She filled his coffee cup.

As a matter of principle Badger took issue with Blizzard at every opportunity. "Maybeso, but I'm here to tell you somethin'," he bristled. "If a woman that feeds hongry Dutch chillun and such-like is a sinner, and if hell is chock full of

sinners like the parsons says—then I'm a-pintin' my hoss' snout in that direction from now on!"

"Wouldn't be at all surprised," drawled Blizzard.

The sheriff and Jake grinned. Mary laughed aloud.

BADGER started a retort, then suddenly stopped to listen. A happy smile broke over his face. Somebody let out a wild yell that others echoed up and down the street. A six-shooter barked joyfully. The irregular pounding of a horse's hooves, the slap and creak of leather, snorts, grunts, shouts, laughter, and a long yell that was jarred and shaken at its source, announced as clearly as words that a bronc had bogged its head and a rider was treating the boys to a show—whether good or bad depending upon the calibers of horse and man.

The broad Ranger got up. He settled his belts on his hips, and with an easy, unconscious movement briefly touched the handles of his guns. "The fellas is a-commencin' to bust loose," he chuckled with boyish enthusiasm. "Which reminds me—I'm on my way to get me another drink of that there Canadian likker. Is anybody comin' along?"

Jake got eagerly to his feet.

King Stannard arose with a shrug.

Mary's happy features suddenly betrayed a secret fear. She aimlessly lifted the coffee pot from the table, and set it down again.

Blizzard arose slowly, watching every-

body, saying nothing, and thinking rapidly. He was satisfied they'd find Carlos at the Canadian. Acting their parts as badmen, they dare not try to avoid him; so another clash was inevitable. It was their job, a risk they had to take, and he hoped it would throw light on the situation.

He looked thoughtfully at Mary. There was a warning for Badger in her troubled face. She knew something. He wished he could have a talk with her before they went to the Canadian, but he didn't know how to work it.

Damn Jake and the sheriff!

He engaged a room for Badger and himself, remarking that more'n likely they'd roll in sometime before morning.

She tried to smile.

Stannard jerked his head toward Badger and remarked soberly, "If he don't stop hunting trouble, I expect you'll have the bed all to yourself."

Badger grunted scornfully. He swaggered out with Jake at his heels. The others followed, Blizzard slouching along in the rear—rifle under his arm.

RATTLESNAKE RUNNELS and Pinto Hawkins were in the middle of a hot argument on the porch of the Canadian. The three men ahead of Blizzard stopped to listen. After a cautious glance around, he slipped away unnoticed in the darkness. Running lightly and swiftly on his toes, he went along the west wall of the building and around behind it, halting by a door in the east wall at the rear of the room. By shifting his position while keeping out of the light, he contrived to see most of the interior.

The place was heavy with smoke that hung in glowering masses, or moved slowly and sinuously in undulating streams toward the tops of open doors and windows. Through it drifted night-flying insects, light from the reflector lamps flickering on their wings as they floated or swooped about them.

And in the smoke moved or lounged men of all descriptions—men who scented bloodshed from afar, and gathered at the

Canadian to watch Carlos make another kill. Among them were cowards who craved the thrill of a performance in which they themselves wouldn't dare to take part. There were fearless men with bloody aspirations of their own, who came to study the methods of the combatants with a view to improving their individual technique. And there were the majority—frontiersmen, dwellers in isolated spots, frequenters of the solitudes—who regarded such episodes as high points in the life they lived, affording material to be embroidered in tales and told in lonely camps, in far-flung bunkhouses, and on desolate trails where topics of interest were frequently as scarce as firewood on the plains.

And there stood the Professor—tall, gaunt, and saturnine—his face almost the color of the smoke that curled around it.

The bar was lined with men, and three bartenders worked at top speed. Another in white apron, served whiskey to five men at a poker table against the opposite wall. The swamper leaned on a broom near by, and his watery eyes followed the glasses with pitiful craving. Without glancing up, one of the players sipped his drink and handed him the balance. The frail old fellow eagerly stood erect, and his slender hand shook when he took the liquor. He bowed with a semblance of ease that suggested a time when he wasn't a swamper.

At a faro layout by the wall to the left of the door, a cowhand cursed, pulled his Colt from its holster, and handed it to the lookout.

"Twenty dollars," muttered the dealer, sliding him a stack of checks.

Another elbowed his way out of the crowd surrounding the roulette table in the center of the floor. His bitter laugh crackled in striking contrast to the merry click of the ball.

"My pony and riggin' was a-ridin' the red, and that damned wheel done set me afoot."

TWO men fell to scuffling at the end of the bar nearest the door. One was cautiously intoxicated, and the other was belligerently drunk. The latter awkwardly pointed with his right arm while struggling to release his left.

"Lemme go, I tell you!" he roared. "That there battered-up jasper ain't behavin' noways sociable. Got a table and bottle all to hisself. Unloose me—damn it!"

His companion hung on desperately. "Shh-h-h Johnny—you blasted fool. He's pizen as hell!"

The man at the table was Carlos!

Blizzard glanced quickly from him to the street entrance. Badger was still on the porch. Light fell across his broad back.

"Damned idjit!" muttered Blizzard.

He turned his attention to Carlos. The gunman's face bore little resemblance to that of the handsome young fellow who crawled Badger a short time back. A welt extended from the black sideburn before his ear, like a streak of crimson warpaint across his swarthy cheek. His nose was swollen and shapeless. Puffed and twisted grotesquely, his lips showed ragged tears where his teeth drove through them. No longer large and clear, his eyes were sunken in pouches of bruised and discolored flesh.

Blizzard swept the crowd with a hasty glance. A tough gang—no doubt about it; but they were leaving Carlos strictly alone. And yet, there were men in that saloon who would hooraw Old Satan if they saw him with two black eyes and a busted nose.

So Carlos must be bad.

For a moment the tall Ranger was a prey to doubt. Had they underestimated the fellow? Had they treated too lightly his local reputation for being unbeatable? He knew that every gunfighter sooner or later met his match, often an unknown just starting up the bloody trail to fame. And he wondered whether this would be

the first and last time when Badger was the slow man.

Blizzard's hand closed on the grip of his rifle, and his thumb found the hammer. Cartridge in the chamber. Maybe he'd better rampse in there and take the fight away from Badger. Carlos *did* look bad. Wasn't shooting off his face, or prancing around. Damn him! Why didn't he behave like most of 'em, and talk loud to make himself brave? He just sat there with his elbows on the table and his eyes on the door—cold as an iceberg—just sitting there, waiting. And Badger took such damned fool chances.

"He shore does," mused the Ranger. "Reckon I'd better go in and—"

Carlos' fingers tightened on his glass. Blizzard shot a glance at the door. Flinging a laughing remark at someone, Badger was coming in!

Blizzard jerked his eyes back to the gunman, and moved closer to the door.

WITH calm deliberation, Carlos pulled his hat lower over his face. Holding a lighted cigarette in his left, the fingers of his right hand beat a slow tattoo on the table. Directly overhead a giant moth whirled through the smoke with insane frenzy and dashed against a lamp chimney with suicidal determination. It fell to the table and its gossamer wings trembled feebly. Carlos deliberately pressed the glowing end of his cigarette against it, watched it scorch and flutter and die, and arose leisurely.

The crowd had waited for this!

A space was quickly cleared between the door through which Badger came laughing, and the table at which Carlos stood motionless. Elbowing and shoving and cursing quietly, men drew back to the walls on either side or sought whatever protection the bar and various tables afforded.

Slightly to one side, stood the Professor. Intent upon getting a clear view, a man halted in front of him. He coughed softly. The man glanced over his shoulder and quickly stepped aside, muttering words of apology.

Heedless of danger, the swamper shuffled over to the deserted poker table almost in front of Carlos, squinted slyly around, and gulped the remnants of two abandoned drinks. Carlos shot out an arm and viciously flung him aside. Hunching his shoulders and covering his face with his arms like a frightened child, he staggered back, tripped over a chair, and went down.

Several men chuckled, and a drunk laughed outright.

Badger rumbled an oath. The swamper was nothing to him; but, like many strong men, the weak had his sympathy. Carlos' cruelty was a spark that touched off his anger. Instantly he changed from a rollicking good fellow to a savage fighting man, ruthless in spirit and short in words. His big hands clenched on his hips. His black eyes lost their mirth, and glared wickedly from beneath their heavy brows. Rage brought splotches of red to his temples and cheeks.

Blizzard knew it was too late to interfere. But—when Carlos started to walk slowly forward, the tall Ranger cursed silently and fought down an urge to cock his Winchester. Badger was the most accurate fast man with a gun he'd ever seen, so the greater the range the better his chances. But no! The damned fool would let Carlos choose his distance, probably so close it would be a question of speed alone. Shore them youngsters couldn't hit nothin' when the other fella had a gun, but he'd oughta know they was sometimes fast as hell on the draw.

Blizzard counted the steps. One—two—three.

The blasted fool! Broad as a tail-gate. Mighty nigh a yard of blue-and-white checked shirt a-showin' where his vest hung open over his belly. Nobody could miss him at that distance.

Four—five—six.

Damn him! Didn't he see that Carlos' face was so battered up it wouldn't tell him nothin'? He couldn't git no idee when the Mex was startin' his draw.

Ten feet apart—no more!

Badger grinned. Carlos stopped, hands brushing the handles of his guns. A man coughed. Another groaned. Another chuckled nervously. A fellow at Blizzard's elbow, a mere boy, gritted his teeth like a man in pain. Above their heads, a lamp spluttered and flickered. A moth fried in its flame.

A DEAFENING roar. Two billows of smoke—one swallowing Carlos from head to hips, another surging against the floor and mushrooming around his boots. No more to be seen. Their hands moved too fast.

Carlos swung around, and coughed, and collapsed to the floor.

The crowd sighed. Its prophesies were not fulfilled, but its patience was rewarded. It saw a man die.

Half crouched, Badger sent a comprehensive glance about him, shrugged, and holstered his gun.

Blizzard's glance darted from face to face, searching for evidence of anger or disappointment. He discovered only wonder and disbelief, until he reached the Professor.

The Professor looked thoughtful.

Stunned by the speed with which the killing took place and amazed at its result, the crowd was slow to get in motion. The little swamper was first to leave his place. Shuffling along wearily as he did when going about his daily duties, he crossed the floor with a bucket of ashes in one hand and a stove shovel in the other. He set them down at the dead man's head. Carlos was shot through the heart, and a pool of blood was spreading. Laying hold of an out-flung hand, the feeble swamper pulled and jerked until he had hauled the body aside a yard.

Then he shovelled ashes onto the blood.

And slouched away without a second glance at the dead man.

Still holding the bucket and shovel—he looked diffidently at Badger and spoke in a timid, almost pleading voice, "Sir, I—I should be greatly honored if—if you'd let me buy you a drink!"

Some men cursed, and others laughed.

Badger grinned like a friendly boy. He swaggered over and threw an arm across the little man's bony shoulders, and led him toward the bar. "Shore you can buy me a drink! Then I'll buy," he rumbled loud enough for everyone to hear. "Ain't never seen the day when I wouldn't drink with a square gent."

The swamper's knees sagged. He walked like a man in a dream.

Blizzard heard a sharp intake of breath at the door behind him, and turned quickly.

Ta-nah!

Chapter V

"SHE-KILLERS IS HELL AND REPEAT!"

THE Indian woman was slithering out of the door. Blizzard caught the scent of the strange perfume he noticed on Jake. It startled him into action. Without knowing exactly why he did it, he grasped her arm none too gently. She majestically stepped back into the room and pulled away from him with a proud, disdainful gesture. Standing erect and forbidding, she met his searching gaze with eyes every bit as fierce as his.

Now that he had the woman on his hands, Blizzard wondered what to do with her. Momentarily at a loss for words, his thoughts raced. That perfume! He had never before smelled anything like it. In common with many of the old plainsmen, he had the nose of a hunting animal and never doubted what it told him. But after all, he reflected, this was nothing to stew about. It merely showed that Jake had been close to this squaw, or maybe Miss Constance—if it was her perfume.

He swept Ta-nah from head to foot with a lightning glance that took in everything. Her moccasins! They suggested a string of ideas that whirled through his brain, and wove wild possibilities that made him clamp his jaws to keep from swearing.

He shot out a long finger, pointing at her feet. "Cherokee!"

Ta-nah looked him squarely in the eye. She answered instantly, "No! Osage."

He knew the moccasins of the Plains Indians. A tingle of triumph went coursing through him. He wanted to grin, but kept a stony face instead.

"You lie! Them's Cherokee moccasins," he rasped frigidly.

Her lids drooped the merest fraction, but her bronze face never altered. She replied with a lofty air, "Yes. Cherokee moccasins on feet of daughter of chief."

Blizzard's sardonic calm was reflected in his brittle voice. "How! And daughter of chief packs grub for Cherokee Lou, a harlot. Good!"

His blow hurt. He caught a fleeting glimpse of her secret thoughts, murder, torture, and all manner of savagery. It took an effort to meet that gaze without flinching. Then the mask fell. Her face became as lifeless as before.

"Like all white men, you lie," she said in harsh, guttural tones without inflection. "I watch over lodge of Ma-na-ka, daughter of dead sister."

"And she calls herself Miss Constance," drawled the Ranger.

Ta-nah's chin came up a trifle higher. "She takes name that pleases her."

Blizzard made an instant decision. His look was an insult, and his tone and words a command. "Go tell Cherokee Lou I come soon."

Her hard lips curled noticeably. "Ma-na-ka smells your thoughts before their stink changes to talk. She waits for you and Big Killer."

He scornfully turned his back to her. Striding away, he felt the stabbing impact of her eyes. A chill ran up and down his spine.

News of the fight had drawn the curious from all directions, and the room was packed with men in a festive mood. A good killing was to this wild town, as a good rain to the parched plains. Moreover, Carlos had few friends and many enemies. More than one man breathed a sigh of relief when he saw the gunman go through the door feet first. Of course, Carlos' conqueror might be just as hard to get along with, but on the surface he appeared to be one of their own kind. So they'd celebrate his victory, and buy him drinks, and try to find out more about him without asking direct questions.

Blizzard scanned the crowd for the Professor. Not in sight.

AT LENGTH the tall Ranger succeeded in catching Badger's eye over the heads of the men hemming him in. Then he ambled back to the roulette table and watched the play until he saw his pardner slide through a side door. A moment or two later they met at the rear of the building.

Without a word, he quickly led the way to a storage shed several yards behind the saloon.

There in the darkness he spoke cautiously, but his words were sharp and decisive. "Things is a damned sight wuss'n I thought we'd find 'em, and I see plenty dust up the trail."

Badger's heart leaped. He caught the ring in Blizzard's voice, and wanted to yell. He read the sign. His lanky pard-

ner had cut a hot trail. He smelled happenings. But he wouldn't let on.

Cocking his head to one side, he fired a question. "Say—what in hell did you find out that's got you in sech a lather?"

Blizzard was deadly serious. "Cain't hardly believe it myself, so I ain't tellin' you nothin' yet. Might put crazy idees in yo' head like I got in mine. But we're a-headin' for the Wild Rose, and we're a-goin' to git a peek at that there Miss Constance woman."

"Bully!" exclaimed Badger. "They ain't nothin' crazy 'bout that idee. It's a joe-dandy. Let's go."

Blizzard laid a detaining hand on his arm.

"Jest calm yo'self, and let this seep into yo' thick skull! When you tangled with Carlos, you up and forgot all I done larned you 'bout gunfightin', but the Good Lawd done saved yo' wuthless life once more. Damned if I know for why."

Badger jerked his arm away and started to speak.

"Hush yo' mouth!" snapped Blizzard. "Now befo' we go any fu'ther, you better recollect that a fella can sometimes take a chance with a he-killer and git away with it, but the fust time he gits a mite frisky with a she-killer—he's a goner! Savvy?"

"Hell! Miss Constance ain't no she-killer. Stop yo' jabberin' and let's us ramble."

Blizzard shrugged his shoulders. Swinging his rifle under his right arm, he set off at a pace that made Badger hurry to keep up. He chose a round-about course to the Wild Rose. After crossing the street where it was comparatively unlighted and at a point some distance from the honkatonk, they approached its rear entrance under cover of the darkness behind other buildings.

Badger was on edge. He didn't know what they were walking into, but he did know it took a lot to fire his cold-blooded pardner to the point where he would show even a trace of excitement. Nor did he comprehend Blizzard's allusion to a "she-killer"; but Blizzard never went off half-cocked, so he knew there was plenty behind it. Moreover, he was dying to meet this strange girl whose acts of charity were talked about in a country where charity was taken for granted; this mysterious lady of the bad-lands where feminine virtue was a huge joke, who apparently had the respect of men who demanded virtue of their women.

Presently the large building loomed up close at hand. Badger heard music, laughter, and the stamp of dancers' feet; but no yells or boisterous language. The thought struck him that this was a mighty tame crowd for a honkatonk.

BLIZZARD spent no time in reconnoitering. He swung the back door open and Badger followed him in. They blinked in the light of a reception hall with a heavy rug under their feet, a large mirror on the wall at their left, and a stairway with thick, red carpet leading up on their right.

Directly in front of them—smiling as though extending a welcome to old friends—stood a pretty little girl with curly red hair, bold laughing eyes, and a green silk dress that began low on her bust and stopped in the region of her knees.

"Howdy, boys!"

Before his eyes became adjusted to the light, Badger saw just enough to make him say to himself that Old Tecumseh Smith was dead right about "them Wild Rose fillies."

An instant later he was able to see clearly.

Red!

And he felt Blizzard staring solemnly down at him like a damned old buzzard, drawling like a parson at a buryin', "Two million cows and fo'ty thousand calves."

Red looked from one to the other in

frank amazement. "Say—what the devil is the matter with you two pilgrims?"

Like the ornery cuss he was, Blizzard elected to keep silent; so Badger had to do the talking.

He managed to pull himself together enough to say, "They—they ain't nothin' the matter with me, uh-h Miss Red, but this here scaly old allygater has got a tech of sun—been out of his head ever sence mawnin'.

Red laughed. She laughed in the same carefree manner as when she was dressed in decent clothes and astride an honest horse. Obviously she was entirely at ease.

Again Blizzard's thin voice tormented the suffering Badger, "No foolin'. This here town is too wild and woolly for—"

Human flesh could stand no more. The heavy fist that crashed into Blizzard's ribs might have ruined any man who wasn't as tough as hickory. The lanky Ranger's grunt was almost an explosion. Then he grinned.

"Don't pay him no mind, Miss Red," he gasped in a weak voice. "The big cuss is chock full of snakehead."

The girl's eyes danced from one to the other. "So that's why it took you so long to get here. I thought maybe you were coming by way of Fort Griffin."

"Nope," drawled Blizzard. "We hit a free gait and figgered we was a-headin' in the right direction, but we got plumb turned around. Cain't noways make out these here city trails."

He added as an afterthought, "You been a-settin' up for us?"

Her sharp eyes swept the length of him. "Sure thing! And we've got lots of company tonight, too; good spenders, every last one of 'em. So you've probably cost me ten dollars in percentage. Got ten dollars?"

She held out her hand.

BLIZZARD regarded the hand with solemn admiration. "Right purty leetle paw. Ain't never done no hard work. Whatever made you calc'late we'd be comin' in the back way?"

Pouting prettily, the girl dropped her arm. She mimicked him. "I didn't cal'late nothin', 'cause Miss Constance does all the calc'latin' round here. Follow me. She's waiting."

She started up the stairs. Blizzard followed, but Badger hesitated. Coming out of his daze ashamed of his embarrassment, he figured he had to do something to redeem himself. Fingering his mustache, he looked wistfully at the door to the dancehall.

The girl saw him hanging back. She stopped and called over her shoulder, "Too bashful to come upstairs, Little Boy?"

Blizzard snickered. Badger's ears got red. "Huh! Ain't a-skeerd of no upstairs," he growled. "It's that there soul-upliftin' music that's makin' me sorta linger."

He nodded at the door. "Reckon they got a fiddle, and a git-tah, and a 'cordion, and—by dogies!—they got 'em a pi-anny! Makes a fella want to rowel hisself in the flank and pitch and stomp a leetle. What say, Red?"

Her face beamed. She turned back. "Sure, Big Feller! I'd love to show off the gunslinger that made Carlos look like an army man. I know a lot of cats that'll be jealous as hell."

Blizzard grinned dryly. He blocked her passage down the steps. "Come on, you crazy yearlin's."

She obeyed him, but made a face over it. "Ain't you got no imagination?"

"Nary a speck," he admitted.

From the landing at the top of the stairway, Red led them back to the hall and pointed to the door at its end. "Guess you can't get lost from here. Go to that door and take off your hats and knock."

Turning away, she smiled at Badger and said, "So 'long. I've got to go and see if I can make an honest living. But

don't you forget, Big Feller—me and you are due to pitch and stomp a leetle."

Badger laughed. "I'll tell a man I won't forgit you, Red."

"Right clever gal," he observed as they tramped down the hall. He had a heap of things to say, but figured they'd have to wait.

"Uh-huh. Too damned smart to stay in this dive very long."

Blizzard spoke as though his mind was on something else. Badger looked intently at him. The tall Ranger's jaw was set, his fierce eyes riveted upon the door ahead. Rifle under his arm, he walked like a man trying to amble while eager to run. His restrained excitement was contagious. Badger caught it.

"She-killers is hell and repeat!" he thought.

Loosening his guns in their holsters, he glanced around him. Through the walls on either hand came the murmur of voices, the rattle of chips, and the clink of money. The carpet beneath their feet was soft and heavily padded. The only sound of their passage was the tinkle of their spurs.

Blizzard knocked deliberately.

The door swung open instantly, as if ready and waiting for his signal.

Ta-nah confronted the Rangers—a gaunt, unfriendly figure in the severe black dress which clothed her from throat to ankles. Her bronze face was expressionless.

Blizzard's bearing was defiant. "Where is she?"

SPARKS shot through the inky depths of Ta-nah's eyes. A knot of muscle showed between the thumb and fingers that gripped the door. Long, corded muscles rippled in her tight sleeves. Badger thought of she-killers. He estimated the length of blade that might be hidden between her flat breasts, beneath her corset.

She made of silence an insult.

A warm voice flowed out of the room behind her. "Come in, gentlemen!"

Blizzard took off his hat and stalked past the Indian woman as though she wasn't there. The muzzle of his rifle almost touched her.

Badger dropped his Stetson and stooped to pick it up. Through the door he saw Blizzard halt, square his shoulders, and gaze down exultantly at a woman on a sofa near the wall.

As Badger walked in, she came to her feet. He had a glimpse of the tiniest of brocaded slippers, and silken ankles smaller than his wrists. She moved into the soft light from a crystal candelabra overhead; dainty and yet stately, a vision in wine colored velvet. A large diamond blazed against the olive skin of her throat, and another sparkled on her hand—the only jewelry she wore.

She looked at him and smiled; pleasure, a warm welcome, full red lips and small white teeth, perfect like the rest of her.

He clenched his fists. Into his mind there flashed from the past another scene. This same woman—half crouched, straddling a dead man, spitting like a wildcat at bay, and cussing like a drunken cowhand.

Cherokee Lou!

He rumbled an oath. From the corner of his eye, he caught Blizzard's whimsical look and dry grin. Again he swore.

She laughed; the cheerful note of a meadowlark after a spring shower. And she spoke in that soft, throaty voice which wasn't the least of her attractions. It belonged to the mellow light and rich atmosphere of the room, and to her own beauty.

"Good evening, Badger. Won't you say 'Howdy' to an old friend?"

He didn't mince words. "Friend, hell!"

An impish light danced in her eye. She gave him her hand, and he surprised himself by taking it. Her strange voice

held mirth, good-fellowship, and a certain nonchalant allurement.

"Don't tell me that you're on the prod just because I tried to kill you."

"Good Lawd! Ain't that a-plenty?"

Again he surprised himself by discovering that he still had hold of her hand. He dropped it.

Tilting her exquisite little head, she regarded him humorously. "For some men, yes. For you, no."

Badger seemed to see her through the swirling smoke from Carlos' gun. He still had the smell of blood in his nostrils, and was belligerent when facing a supposed enemy. Besides, there was the shock of finding her here—not to mention Blizzard's irritating grin.

"You're dead wrong," growled the big Ranger. "Jest try to lift my topknot, and I'll fight tooth-and-toenail a mite harder than any fella you ever sot eyes on."

Miss Constance laughed with the utmost self-assurance. Motioning them to plush-upholstered chairs facing the sofa, she sank upon it with an unstudied grace that was a treat to the eyes of men unaccustomed to such elegance.

"Of course you'll fight, and better than anyone I know," she admitted sincerely, glancing quickly from one to the other. "But you Rangers make risking your lives a business, so when someone tries to kill you—you don't take it to heart as much as other men and you forget quicker."

BLIZZARD drawled seriously. "Oh, shore! We jest cain't remember sech doin's. Wish we could."

She gave him a malicious glance and went on talking to Badger.

Having verified his suspicions by proving "Miss Constance" to be Cherokee Lou, whom he had encountered before, Blizzard lost his fiery eagerness. Once more he was himself—drawling, calculating, and utterly impervious to the assaults of feminine charms when his duty as an officer of the law was involved.

For half an hour they talked at random, and he was glad of it. He needed time to study the woman. In appearance, language, and actions she had undergone a change for the better, so pronounced as to make him doubt the evidence of his own eyes and ears. She had made herself over, but he knew that the dainty,

soft-spoken, educated girl was Cherokee Lou—a vicious woman capable of almost insane hatred, a very devil of a killer. Yet it seemed impossible for any girl to be so finished an actress. Maybe she wasn't acting.

He cussed the luck that tangled him with a woman.

But he admired brains and cleverness wherever he found them, and gave her no end of credit. Badger wasn't any fool and plenty tough when riled, but she was cooling him off and calming him down with the mastery of an old twister working on a kinky pony.

So Blizzard mentally took off his hat to Cherokee Lou.

Suddenly and without warning, Miss Constance changed the subject. Looking Blizzard squarely in the eye, she declared, "I suppose you think I should be sorry for the things I did when we met before, don't you?"

Realizing that she tried to catch him off guard, he measured his words. "Nope, cain't rightly say that I do. I allow that feelin' sorry or not is a fella's own pussonal business."

She spoke to Blizzard, but smiled at

Badger—a girlish, disarming smile. "Well I am sorry—at least, kind of."

The lanky Ranger eyed her narrowly, but his voice was commonplace. "If it's a fair question, how come?"

Miss Constance settled back against the cushions and lit a cigarette. Indicating a decanter of whiskey and glasses on a carved mahogany stand at Badger's elbow, she said, "Just help yourselves. And please smoke."

He poured three drinks and offered one to her.

She shook her head. "You take mine, Badger. I'm half Indian, and I've seen what it does to the Red Man."

Sitting with knees crossed and an elbow resting upon them, Miss Constance watched the Rangers drink and graciously acknowledged the compliments they paid her fine liquor. While they rolled and lit cigarettes, she gazed thoughtfully at the buffalo robe at their feet.

"You killed my husband," she began in frank, man-to-man fashion, her voice retaining its peculiar richness with no suggestion of self-pity. "Oh yes! I was properly married to Chickasaw," she added with a quick glance at Blizzard.

He nodded solemnly.

The girl continued evenly, "You insulted me, and you hurt my pride by making me afraid of you. That was very bad, because I'm not afraid of men."

Badger chuckled.

She looked impudently at him. "And your sweetheart shot me. So taking everything into consideration, I thought I had plenty of reason to hate you thoroughly."

The girl paused to flick ashes from her cigarette.

"'Pears to me you did," observed Badger with a dry grin. "Leastwise, most folks would've calc'lated they did."

Blizzard said nothing. A little frown settled between his frosty eyes. The alert, unwavering gaze with which he studied her every move and expression, would have made another woman uncomfortable. Miss Constance seemed entirely at ease.

GLANCING from one to the other with the frank and open expression of one who had nothing to hide, she continued; and in some manner, she clothed her words with a mantle of sincerity that was either genuine or a masterpiece of deception. "Belle Ransom's bullet almost killed me, and while lying in bed I did a lot of thinking. In the end I had to admit that you killed Chickasaw in a fair fight, while doing your duty as peace officers; that you were acting as officers of the law when you treated me rough, so there was nothing personal about it; and finally—Belle Ransom shot me to save her sweetheart's life, which is exactly what I would've done."

She smiled briefly. "The fact that I was about to go racking over the Divide had nothing to do with those conclusions. In religion I'm an Indian, so the Happy Hunting Grounds hold no terrors for me. It was simply my commonsense taking charge of things while I was too weak to make it misbehave."

Miss Constance brought the cigarette to her lips and inhaled deeply. "So that's why I'm pretty nearly sorry."

She sank back against the plush, and her eyes seemed to lengthen while she watched the Rangers through the smoke.

Badger had the uneasy sensation that she was reading his thoughts. He wanted to say something, but couldn't decide what it ought to be; so he poured Blizzard another drink, and appropriated the one she refused.

The lean Ranger inspected his glass with an admiring eye, and spoke up lazily, "Sounds sensible, all right. But me and Badger ain't nothin' to you, so why feel anyways sorry?"

Her face hardened a trifle. "Hell man! Don't you give me credit for enough sense to know that it doesn't pay anyone to buck your game?"

He countered dryly, "A whole slew of fellas with a heap of sense don't noways feel thataway 'bout it."

She sat up straight and answered with spirit. "Certainly! And sooner or later you'll get 'em. No sir! I'm damned glad I finally had brains enough to realize that by running this joint and half a dozen others like it, I can make all the money I'll ever need without locking horns with the law. As a business proposition, I'd a lot rather have your friendship than my revenge—if I've got any coming."

Blizzard thoughtfully tasted his whiskey, and allowed, "Somehow or other, I allus figgered that a gal jest naturally had to try to git even with a fella that done her dirt. But mebbe you're a mite different."

She made a negative gesture. "Not a bit! If I let my temper go and didn't stop to think, I'd sure try to get even with you."

THE Ranger stroked his jaw with a long hand, and eyed her closely. "Uh-huh. I sorta calc'lated you did when you sicked that there Mex onto us."

Badger choked on his liquor.

Cherokee Lou's eyes opened wide. "I've been waiting for that!" she exclaimed. "When Ta-nah told me you suspected I was here, I knew you'd think I caused Carlos to pick a fight with you."

"Cain't blame me much, can you?"

The girl got up suddenly. With quick, nervous movements she poured a glass of water from a carafe on the stand. She drank, and still holding the glass, turned to meet Blizzard's level gaze.

"No, I can't," she said frankly. "And the hell of it is, it's true!"

"I'll be doggoned!" exploded Badger, wondering what this girl would do or say next. He was ready for anything.

Blizzard's lids narrowed and his lips tightened. He waited for her to continue.

She sat down wearily. "Carlos was here with me when you rode in. I was excited and didn't stop to think, so I pointed you out to him and told him you were Buffalo and Pelican—two famous outlaws. To make matters worse, I said Buffalo was the fastest man with a gun I'd ever seen. That's what did it. Carlos was jealous of his reputation, and I was a fool not to realize what was bound to happen."

Badger spoke up quickly. "No harm done, Miss. Nobody got a scratch—exceptin' them Mex's."

"Was Carlos a friend of your'n?" sharply inquired Blizzard.

Miss Constance made no effort to avoid his gaze. "No," she replied promptly. "In fact, I was at the point of considering him an enemy."

"Mind sayin' why?"

"Not at all!" she flared. "For the same reason that other men have come to be my enemies. They refuse to believe that when I want another man, I'll work the herd and cut out the one I like best."

Blizzard pulled the lobe of his ear and drawled, "Reckon you handle men like us fellas handles cows."

Miss Constance laughed, and Badger joined in. He watched her throat flutter like a mocking bird's, and thought her laughter every bit as musical as its song. But he was young and sentimental, and she was the prettiest little thing he ever saw, and her whiskey was powerful good.

"Thanks for the compliment, Blizzard," she said presently. "It's a fact. I can handle men."

Nothing egotistical about it. Merely a simple truth, plainly stated.

He changed the subject. "I'm sorta curious to know why you told Carlos we was Buffalo and Pelican, if it's a fair question."

Her expression was suddenly mischievous. "Maybe it was because I think you make better outlaws than Rangers."

Badger laughed heartily. He swore to himself that he wouldn't have believed Cherokee Lou could be such a cute leetle devil.

Blizzard grinned frostily. "Maybeso. And on the other hand, mebbee you had a purty good reason for not wantin' Carlos to know we was Rangers. Cain't never tell."

The girl laughed lightly. "No sah, you cain't never tell," she mimicked him. "So I'll tell you the truth, but you won't believe me. It was because I wasn't sure whether you were coming here as Rangers, so I played safe and said you were outlaws. I knew that wouldn't interfere with your plans, whatever they are."

"Much obliged," drawled Blizzard skeptically. "Shore wish everybody was as keerful 'bout us Rangers' plans."

She pouted. "Now you're just being ornery! I didn't want to do anything to cause you trouble."

"Figgerin' it'd be pore business?"

Miss Constance shrugged her bare shoulders—right prettily, thought Badger.

"Partly that and partly something else," she declared. "I've been hoping for a chance to make friends with you two devils."

She paused and looked sharply at each of them.

Neither had a word to say. Blizzard thought she seemed a trifle older.

WHEN the girl continued, her voice was as soft as ever; but into it crept an undertone of determination too clear to be overlooked. "Again you're wondering why. All right, I'll tell you. I like men—real men. I can't be bothered with the other kind. It doesn't make a bit of difference to me whether those real men are cowhands or Rangers or outlaws. I get a thrill out of making them like me—fall for me, if you want to call it that. It raises my opinion of myself."

Obviously choosing her words with care, she concluded with a frankness that was complimentary. "You fellows are real men. You're the only men who ever had the brains and guts to give me a licking." She smiled whimsically. "I'm good and I know it, and it takes a damned good man to get the best of me!"

Badger's eyes danced, and he hid a grin with his hand.

"You shore don't mince no words," drawled Blizzard.

"And why shouldn't I be honest about it?" she demanded with a show of feeling. "You understand, because you know women of my type. We'll fight him like the very devil, then love the man who is man enough to trounce us!"

Badger was completely flabbergasted. While talking, she looked at him most of the time, although it was Blizzard who treated her rough upon that former occasion. There was a lure about the woman that for the moment made him forget who she was. Her apparent honesty appealed to his straight-forward nature, got underneath his hide, as he'd describe it. He didn't know what to say. So he poured himself another drink.

Blizzard wanted to cuss. This girl was twice as smart as he thought she'd be, and therefore ten times as dangerous. She was so infernally outspoken and frank about everything, there wasn't a man in a thousand who wouldn't believe her. Damn her! Badger was young. Badger was a good-looking scalawag. Badger was soft-hearted where women were concerned. She had her eye on Badger, and she was a-shakin' out a loop. If he couldn't outfigure her, he saw trouble ahead for Badger.

Cherokee Lou was bad and didn't deny it!

He thought it expedient to change the subject. "I'm sorta wonderin' how much you happen to know 'bout them plans of our'n, if you don't mind sayin'."

Miss Constance smiled in a tantalizing way. He experienced the disagreeable feeling that she knew she had him guessing. "Won't go as far as to say I know anything," she remarked cautiously. "But I've got some mighty strong suspicions, Sergeant Wilson."

Badger jerked erect in his chair. "Whoa-a-up Miss! How'd you come to know he's jest been made a sa'jint?"

The girl had a shrewd light in her eye. "You'd be surprised how much I've learned about you two wildcats."

BLIZZARD was past the stage where he'd be surprised at anything she did or said. So he stuck to the important question. "I allow it ain't 'specially comfortin' to a officer to find out that somebody suspicions what he's calc'latin' to do in a tough country like this'n. But more'n likely you're jest a-lettin' on."

"You wouldn't try to find out, would you, Blizzard?" she murmured with an oblique glance. "But I don't mind telling you. Everybody knows what trouble the Box J has been having, and of course I expected that sooner or later Belle Ransom would send for you. Naturally, I suppose you're here to get to the bottom of that mess."

Blizzard nodded solemnly. Daggone the woman! She talked too damned straight for a girl as pretty as she was. He wanted to believe every word she said, so he knew she was the slickest liar he ever saw. And the little devil was holding good cards. One word from her, and they'd be in a hell of a pickle.

He gruffly told Badger to pour him a big drink.

Miss Constance obviously enjoyed watching his Adam's apple slide up and down. When he emptied the glass and drew a long breath, she remarked cordially, "If I can help you while you're here, just let me know. I've got lots of friends in this country, and very few enemies."

Having done a heap of riding and wound up back of where he started, Blizzard figured he'd better try another trail. He'd play her game for a spell. In his droll manner, he could be just as deceptive as he judged her to be.

"I calc'late we're a-goin' to need plenty help," he drawled, fingering his mustache. "Mebbe you and us could do a leetle swappin', off and on. Is some cus a-pesterin' you pussonal, or somethin'?"

Badger couldn't believe his ears, for he'd swear Blizzard meant what he said.

The girl made no effort to hide her surprise. "That's something I didn't expect!" she exclaimed. "And I'm wondering why."

Puckery lines came at the corners of Blizzard's level eyes. He met her calculating look with the beginnings of a grin. "You like real men, and I like real brains; 'specially when I find 'em inside the head of a purty gal, where I'm expectin' to find a heap of nothin' at all."

He thought that hit her weakness.

She beamed with pride and burst out triumphantly, "Hear that, Badger? Considering where it came from, it's one of the finest compliments I ever had paid to me. When Sergeant Wilson tells me I've got brains, I believe it myself."

Glancing slyly at Blizzard, she added, "They say he has the keenest mind in the Ranger force."

"Gruumph!" rumbled Badger. "Somebody done lied 'bout him somethin' scandalous."

Blizzard ignored Badger and riveted his attention upon the girl. He wanted her to talk, and knew she wasn't afraid to do it; so he urged her on. "Maybe the fellas that's a-trompin' on yo' toes—if any of 'em is—will turn out to be the jaspers we gotta round up. Cain't tell."

Miss Constance appeared to give the matter some serious consideration. Clasp-

ing her hands behind her head, she stared thoughtfully at the ceiling. Presently she said, "I don't know. But there's a chance that one of my enemies is mixed up in the Box J trouble."

SHE hesitated for a moment. Blizzard figured she was cooking up a nice lie; but for the life of him, he didn't know what made him think it.

Cherokee Lou continued, "If I were in your boots, the first man I'd suspect would be Jake Rupper."

"You don't say!" exclaimed Badger. "Why, Jake fed with us tonight and I figgered he was a right clever fella."

Her face was serious. "I know he did. Ta-nah told me. Don't trust him out of your sight."

"He said some mighty nice things 'bout you."

"Naturally he did," she remarked scornfully. "Jake's as smooth as they come. But, if he thought he wouldn't get caught, he'd cut my throat in a minute."

Blizzard eyed her hard. He remembered the perfume on Jake. It was hers, all right. At that instant he would've given his shirt to know what was going on behind her low, broad forehead.

"Rupper shore is a slippery lookin' cuss," he observed. "But you cain't hang a fella jest 'cause he looks like he had it comin'."

She nodded, and said nothing.

Incapable of the tricky maneuvers that Blizzard frequently employed, Badger invariably drove straight at the heart of any problem that bothered him. "Whatever makes you suspicion Jake, if it's a fair question, Miss?"

Cherokee Lou exercised the prerogatives of a girl with brains, and took the offensive with the kind of a smile that would pull the teeth of any man's impertinent question. "Badger, you should know better than to ask a woman 'why'? If she doesn't know, she'll hide her ignorance by answering 'Because'; and if she knows but doesn't want to tell you, she'll give you the same reply every time."

Badger subsided.

Blizzard concluded they had better get out of there. From the moment he met her, he had tried to act as she would naturally expect him to behave—showing the right amount of hostility and all that. Above everything, he didn't want her to get the idea she was under suspicion, and the slightest slip on their part would put the smart little devil on guard.

Uncoiling from his chair, he drawled, "Reckon we better pull our freight. Had a right nice visit, ma'm, and don't you forgit to holler fust time you need a leetle help."

Miss Constance quickly got to her feet. Stepping close to Blizzard, she placed a hand on his arm. Her bright eyes searched his solemn face. "Guess I figured you wrong. You can be nice, can't you Blizzard?"

"Not frequent," growled Badger.

Blizzard's face matched the red in the bandanna around his neck. "W-wouldn't be surprised if it's yo' likker a-workin' on me, ma'm," he stammered. "T'ain't natural."

She laughed. "I don't believe it!"

GIVING Blizzard's arm a squeeze, she glanced at Badger. "I'm not going to let you fellows get away from me so easily," she said with a friendly smile; then her face grew serious. "What I'm going to do now will help you a lot, but it's sure to make you a dangerous enemy. Are you game?"

Blizzard hitched his weight from one leg to the other. "We shore need help."

Badger's eyes twinkled. "Me—I jest dote on enemies. Who is this'n?"

"Jake Rupper."

"How come?"

"Follow me."

Ta-nah materialized out of nothing and opened the door.

Without looking back, Cherokee Lou and Badger went down the hall chattering and laughing. She had her arm through his.

Blizzard tarried at the door. He stood rigidly erect a yard in front of Ta-nah. His lean face was as cold and unmoved as hers. With deliberation, he drew a knife from the inside pocket of his vest and handed it to her—hilt foremost.

"A squaw's knife!" he said.

She took the weapon. Harsh, guttural words came rasping through her hard lips. "Good knife! Never miss twice."

Blizzard swung his rifle under his arm, and turned his back to her. In long strides, he overtook Cherokee Lou and Badger at the stairway and followed them down to the parlor entrance. The music had just stopped. A flurry of laughter, mixed voices, the clump of heels, and the clatter of glasses came through the door.

With a hand on the knob, the girl turned and gave the Rangers a challenging look. "Jake's bad medicine. Want to change your minds?"

Blizzard pulled a sober face. "I'm a-shakin' in my boots, but Old Curiosity done throwed me. Lead on."

Chapter VI

"jest a-pilin' up trouble for badger."

MISS CONSTANCE opened the door. Noise in the large room fell to a murmur. Under soft lights, the Rangers found themselves the subject of interested and inquiring stares from all sorts of men, and women of but one sort. The revellers were seated at small tables, placed so as to leave part of the floor clear for dancing. Colored girls in starchy white dresses and lace caps, moved about the room with bottles, trays, glasses, and toothy smiles. On the walls hung several excellent paintings of white girls who made no effort to conceal their natural charms, appeared happy in their wicked surroundings, and smiled welcomes to the guests.

"Howdy, Folks!" Miss Constance called out airily.

Plainly she was popular. They greeted her hilariously but not boisterously. Several men flourished glasses or bottles, inviting her to drink; but without exception, they called her "Miss."

Nodding and smiling to right and left, she asked them to be quiet. They obeyed instantly. With a Ranger towering on either side, she slipped her arms through theirs. Blizzard was on fire. His feet didn't feel right, and he couldn't find a place for his hands. Thoroughly at ease and enjoying himself hugely, Badger twisted his mustache and grinned at the world in general. That is, he grinned until he caught sight of a man standing alone—the Professor.

With arms folded, he stood utterly motionless near the front door. In that subdued light he looked taller, gaunter, and more lifeless than ever. His face might have been carved from some bluish stone, and his eyes polished balls of ebony set deep within the shadows of his brows.

He gazed with unfaltering interest at Badger, as though the big Ranger was a problem that had to be solved.

Blizzard instantly sensed a change in Cherokee Lou. In some subtle manner, she appeared to radiate the spirit of the men of that time and region—a laughing, open-handed, rollicking good fellow.

She even altered her language the proper amount exactly. "Ladies and Gents, I want you-all to meet some old friends of mine. Right now they're calling themselves Badger and Blizzard, but the last time I saw 'em, they were somebody else. And so was I, as far as they're concerned, because they knew me by my Indian name." She glanced slyly up at Blizzard. "I'm having a hard time convincing them I'm the little squaw they used to know."

The tall Ranger squirmed and wished he was plumb away from there.

She laughed lightly, then continued, "I'll never forget how they busted into the reservation with half a dozen Deputy United States Marshals on their tails. That was right after I came home from Indian school. They holed up in my mother's lodge for more than a month, and I helped cook their grub. How these fellows can eat!"

That brought a burst of laughter. She glanced proudly from one to the other. "A while back, they did me a mighty good turn and I'm not forgetting it. So from now until noon tomorrow, the house is theirs. Ladies and gents, their money isn't any good!"

She waved a hand at the pale fellow who slouched in a bored attitude at the piano, "Professor, give us a waltz!"

Badger hastily removed his spurs and hung them on the wall under his hat.

Cherokee Lou slid into his arms, and they swung into the dance. This was his idea of a grand time. He got a whiff of her perfume, and swore that his head was a-floatin' in the clouds. Alcohol tore through his veins at a high lope, and his heart was a-jumpin' crooked. Music went in his ears, and settled in his feet. So he waltzed like he did everything else—high, wide, and handsome.

To make things just right, he didn't have to worry about his partner's fancy slippers; they seemed never to touch the floor anyhow. Ahead of her time as far as the decorous waltz was concerned, she let her body slink close to his and laid her cheek on his breast. Right there and then his old heart sunfished, swapped ends, and did a back-fall. Surely she heard the wild exuberance that tossed and rumbled in his chest, a-fixin' to bust out. He was dying to sound the long yell, and afraid to do it.

Her dainty little face was roguish and full of hell. Her large, fiery eyes caught his and shot sparks of deviltry. She pinched a fold of the leathery skin on his neck. His mustache brushed her forehead, and she laughed gleefully.

"Tear up the scenery, Big Feller! I'm a-ridin' loose, so if you throw yourself I'll light on my feet."

Cherokee Lou knew her men!

TWO small hands caught Blizzard's arm. He glanced down into Red's upturned face. "Come on, High Pockets!" she cried. "I'm near sighted and I can't see the top of you, and my legs are so short I'll have to take six steps to your one—but I'll betcha we can cover more ground than they're covering. Let's go!"

Beneath the humor in her voice, he detected chagrin. It gave him an idea.

He grinned wryly down at her. "You're a nervy gal, but I cain't cut 'er. What I mean, Red, nothin' shorter'n a giraft can dance with me and live to eat another breakfast. Let's set and I'll buy."

She giggled and led him to a vacant table.

When the colored girl came, Red said off-hand, "Two bottles of wine, Susie—the best."

Blizzard gave the grinning waitress a sharp look. She didn't move.

"Red, I been up the trail more'n once," he drawled. "When I'm a-settin' in this game, dollar drinks is my limit."

He twisted the drooping ends of his mustache, and glanced up at the colored girl. "Two bottles of beer, Susie—the best."

Red shook her head at the waitress and laughed at Blizzard. "You don't look it, Mossyhorns, but your memory ain't none too good."

"How come?"

"You already forgot what Madam said."

"What's that?"

"Right now, you own this joint and all the drinks and girls in it."

"Humph!" he sniffed to show his scorn.

Red thrust her pretty face as close to his as the table would permit. She spoke confidentially, "You betcha! And she'll cut your throat if you don't take her at her word."

Throat slitting and Cherokee Lou went together right nicely, thought Blizzard.

He cleared his throat solemnly. "Susie, trot in the wine."

The wine came promptly. While depositing her percentage check in her stocking, Red followed Badger and his partner with an expression that indicated she had a temper of well developed proportions. "Damn him! He'll be too snooty to see me when she turns him loose."

"Maybe she won't never onloose him," soberly observed Blizzard. "Cain't tell."

Red favored him with an eloquent look. "I'll admit he's the kind of a rootin', tootin', son-of-a-gun that a girl likes, but High Pockets—you don't know that woman!"

"Nope, allow I don't," mused the Ranger, watching the dancers. "But ever sence I knowed him, far and wide, the gals has fit over the wuthless cuss."

Her chin went up a notch. "And I've seen 'em fight like hell over a cigarette butt."

He took time to admire Cherokee Lou's technique when she playfully pulled Badger's ear as they galloped past. "I wouldn't be surprised if Miss Constance could put up a right smart fight for a fella if she was a-mind to."

"She's never had to fight for anything," scornfully replied the girl, going on with engaging frankness, "Does he like red heads?"

"They's his pussonal weakness," solemnly avowed Blizzard.

ELBOWS on the table, Red cradled her chin in the cup of her hands and talked on with a far-away look in her eye. "The only way a girl can get anywhere in this God-forsaken country is to catch herself a fancy gunslinger like him. She'll spend the balance of her days getting him out of trouble and they won't live long, but with her brains and his guns they'll make a name for themselves. And what more does any damned fool want?"

Blizzard nodded grimly. From the side of his eye he watched her laying plans, building air castles, dreaming dreams; a honkatonk girl's dreams of grandeur—a short and turbulent life, a violent death, and a name for herself!

Having known other ambitious girls like Red, he had recognized the symptoms when she first met Badger. No use preaching to her. So he'd use her if he could.

"'Pears to me that Miss Constance has made a name for herself without no gunfighter to help her," he observed casually. "Reckon it can be done all right."

Red's face hardened momentarily. Her glance darted to the Professor and away again. At the point of speaking, she bit her lip and said nothing.

Blizzard thoughtfully emptied his glass. The girl kept silent, and he made no effort to lead her on; a job for Badger.

From time to time, Blizzard stole a glance at the Professor. He shortly discovered that the gunman's large, luminous eyes followed Cherokee Lou and her partner continually. Certainly not one of her coquettish tricks would escape that steady gaze.

"Jest a-pilin' up trouble for Badger,"

he reflected grimly. "And mebbe for her ownself to boot."

The Ranger also kept an eye open for Jake Rupper. He hoped the dandy would show up before they left; wanted to find out whether Cherokee Lou knew what she was talking about. And he didn't have long to wait.

Through the front door opening into the barroom, came Jake—swaggering as if he owned the place. He swept off his hat with a flourish. Light glistened on his greased and plastered hair. Posing for a moment with a hand at his mustache, he returned laughing replies to the greetings that came from all sides. Girls clustered around him. He treated them with a lofty, condescending air, appearing to grow even taller while basking in their admiration. A sharp-faced brunette pulled his head down and whispered in his ear.

He snapped erect, and his beady eyes darted from couple to couple on the dance floor. His unusual height enabled him to look over the heads of others, so he probably caught sight of Badger and the girl in a far corner. For the briefest instant, Blizzard saw murder in Jake's long, cruel face. A moment later he was again a witty, conceited sport—the idol of the bad lands.

Cherokee Lou was right. Another enemy, a bad one.

The music stopped. Miss Constance and Badger dropped into chairs at Blizzard's table. Jake arrived almost immediately.

"How's everybody?" he sang out cordially. He took a chair without an invitation. "Badger, you shore was a-cuttin' capers."

Badger's good-natured face flushed with boyish pleasure. He glanced proudly at Cherokee Lou. "Jest couldn't help myself, Jake," he panted. "Done wore my feet plumb down to the hocks a-tryin' to keep up with my pardner. Like settin' out to ketch a butterfly in a norther."

"More likely a bumblebee," Miss Constance declared breathlessly. "What a dance! It was lots of fun, and we'll do it again sometime."

Rupper cut in. "You're steppin' the next one with me, ain't you Connie?"

THE girl inspected her face in a tiny mirror, tucking in a stray hair or two. "Sorry, Jake. I'm tired. No more for me tonight. I'll see if I can get Anton to play for us, then I must go."

Jake's conceit arose to the occasion. He wasn't noticeably depressed by her refusal.

She had no trouble catching the Professor's eye, for his interest was centered upon that table to the exclusion of everything else in the room. He stalked slowly across the floor, and stopped near her with the suggestion of a bow.

"Did you want something, Miss Constance?"

She glanced from him to each of the Rangers in turn. "Anton, I believe you've already met these gentlemen."

He nodded carelessly.

Badger and Blizzard made appropriate remarks.

The girl smiled up at him for an instant, then softly asked, "Will you play for me, Anton? Just once—anything."

A quick flash of pleasure worked a wonder on his somber face. "Of course."

He left at once, walking with a spring in his step.

While waiting for the Professor to return from his room with his violin, Miss Constance chatted gaily with those at the table and others near by. Blizzard studied her, and cast an eye over the room, and listened, and swore he had never seen the beat of it. Except for the way the girls were dressed, the liquor in sight, and a little cussing now and then—this honka-tonk crowd wasn't behaving much worse than the folks at a country picnic.

No doubt about it, Cherokee Lou was somebody on this Whirlwind range. She

had him guessing, and he saw at a glance that she had Badger plumb bamboozled already. He looked at her, and he listened to her, and he wished to hell he was back a-workin' stock.

THE Professor came in from the rear with a violin under his arm. Evidently to hear him play was considered something of a treat. Noise subsided rapidly. Waitresses ceased their activities and stood with backs to the wall. Here and there, sober heads quieted those who felt their liquor. Someone passed the word to the barroom. Men came hurrying in to find seats as quickly and quietly as possible. Without exception they removed their hats, and this is no doubt included some who practically lived in their headgear.

Blizzard saw all these things and couldn't help thinking, "Us West Texas men is tough, and I reckon we're savages and heathens jest like the tenderfeet from Back East allow we are when they poke fun at our looks, and clothes, and talk. But by Dogies—jest give us a chance to git a nibble at somethin' good and we shore as hell gobble it up! Wouldn't be surprised if it tastes a heap better to us than it does to them as ain't never had to git along without sech fancy fixin's. Cain't tell."

The Professor raised the violin, closed his sunken eyes, and played. As the first strains arose, the ashen face that nestled against the instrument seemed transformed into the lifeless features of a man who died happy. And to the untrained minds in the audience, the music itself may have seemed to come from another world; weird, unearthly, fantastic music that lent itself to the individual interpretation of every listener—each according to his fancy. Cruel music that tore at the nerves of the timid and left them fearful. Plaintive music that touched the hearts of the charitable. Captivating music that shamelessly whispered seductive words. And noble music that portrayed grand scenes and described stirring deeds.

At length it faded and died in a passage of ineffable pathos.

The Professor opened his eyes. Instantly they came to rest upon Miss Constance—slightly inquisitive, a little doubtful, and very hopeful. Shouts, hand clapping, stamping, and whistling from the crowd; apparently he didn't hear it. Having played for her alone, to her he looked for his applause.

Blizzard glanced at the girl. Her lips were parted, her eyes moist, and her breast rose and fell rapidly. She stared at the gunman-musician as though hypnotized.

And the Ranger thought, "She loves that there man—when he's a-playin' on his fiddle."

Her emotions had control for an instant only. She nodded and smiled at Anton, and calmly turned to the Rangers.

"You boys go ahead and have a good time," she remarked pleasantly. "Sorry I can't stay and help you. But if you get away without letting me see you again, I'll send a posse after you."

Blizzard returned her quizzical look with good measure, and drawled, "We ain't got a mite of use for posses, Miss, so I reckon mebbe you'll be seein' us a-plenty."

Badger aimed to say something polite, but Blizzard's subtle threat sort of knocked the wind out of him. Cherokee Lou was on her way to the back door before he got his ideas untangled.

Suddenly a commotion started in one of the gambling rooms overhead. There came a mighty yell, chips clattered and coins rattled, and something crashed to the floor with force enough to jar the building. Heavy footsteps thumped rapidly on the thick carpet above, and came blundering down the stairway. The next moment Big Whiskers, the freighter, filled the doorway. He stood with legs spread

and a hand against the jamb on either side to steady his huge bulk. His eyes were bloodshot and blazing with rage. His beard seemed to bristle. He had lost his hat, and his shaggy head weaved like a mad bull's. The man was just drunk enough to be destructive and otherwise dangerous.

MISS CONSTANCE stopped facing him, a few feet away.

Badger and Blizzard got up quickly.

In the act of carefully replacing his violin in its case, the Professor paused and glanced over his shoulder; then he closed the top with a snap and walked leisurely toward the big man.

"Waugh-h-h!" bellowed the freighter with a great oath. "They cleaned me. But I'll git my money's wuth, by God!"

His arm shot out and his thick fingers closed on Cherokee Lou's bare shoulder. He jerked her to him. "Com'ere to yo' pappy, honey!"

Her right hand darted to her bosom, and he caught her wrist in the nick of time.

The Rangers came lunging from their table, knocking over chairs and brushing men and women aside. But the Professor got there ahead of them. He covered the remaining distance in what seemed a step, and with no apparent loss of dignity or composure.

"Stop it!" he commanded without raising his voice.

Big Whiskers swung the girl aside. With surprising agility, he whipped a knife from his belt and launched a vicious upward stab at the slender gunman. Anton swayed his lithe body barely enough to avoid the blade. His spidery arm whipped through the air in a short arc. His Colt slapped the ruffian's temple with a sharp crack, like a barrel stave slapping a rock.

Big Whiskers dropped the knife. His arms hung straight down from his shoulders. He trembled in all his limbs. His eyeballs rolled upward until only the whites were visible. His knees collapsed slowly, and he wilted to the floor. The perfectly timed blow from a heavy gun barrel had laid his scalp open to the bone.

Cherokee Lou smiled up at the Professor. "On the job as usual," she said softly. "Thank you, Anton."

He inclined his head and holstered his gun.

A noisy crowd quickly gathered about the group at the door. Several voices inquired whether Miss Constance was hurt.

She looked around her. Her eyes danced and she laughed gayly. "Nary a scratch, as Badger Coe would say."

Nodding toward the man at her feet, she told the Professor, "I'm glad you didn't hurt him any worse than you did. He's a good-hearted scamp, even if he is a little rough when he's tight. Take him to the back room and have Doc Furnace stitch him up."

"We ought to stretch him up!" exclaimed Jake Rupper in a chesty voice. Having tried his best and failed to arrive on the scene ahead of the Professor, Jake was nettled.

His suggestion met the hearty approval of the gang. Cries of "String him up!" arose on every hand. Most of the women backed off as best they could, and the men elbowed closer.

The Rangers exchanged eloquent glances. There was the feel of trouble in the air. Badger loosened his guns in their holsters. Blizzard made certain that his Colt and knife were in place, and wished that he hadn't left his rifle in the entrance hall. He knew that Cherokee Lou was too smart to want the man lynched, and he wondered how she'd handle this ticklish situation. He soon found out.

LOOKING defiantly at those who yelled the loudest, particularly Rupper, she declared firmly, "We'll do nothing of the sort! And what's more—An-

ton, I want you to find out whether Big Whiskers has enough money left to keep him going. If he hasn't, I'll stake him."

The Professor nodded.

Jake wore the countenance of a man who felt himself being put in place. And there were other men who showed signs of wishing they were elsewhere. One of them hurried away, muttering that he'd go fetch the Doc.

Blizzard grinned.

"She's smart as a whip and nervy as hell," thought Badger.

Again Miss Constance spoke to the crowd. "If it wasn't for these freighters, we'd go naked and starve and die thirsty out here in the wilderness. So we don't want to put any of 'em out of business."

As if that definitely settled the matter, she turned away and left through an opening in the circle of spectators. At the door, she smiled over her shoulder. "And besides, they're damned good spenders when they've got it to spend," she observed whimsically. "Good night, folks."

Nothing more was said about hanging Big Whiskers. On the contrary, he forthwith became an object of sympathy. As many men as could fasten onto some part of him, assisted in carrying the big fellow to a small room at the rear. Offers of first aid were numerous, all of which indicated the use of liquor in some form.

Hovering near the injured man was a woman with a ponderous bosom and hips to match, and a face unsuited to the rest of her—small and round, with apple cheeks and large, blue eyes of baby innocence.

Although she took up a lot of space and got under foot, Badger noticed that no man audibly objected.

So when Rattlesnake Runnels staggered past with Big Whiskers' plug of eatin' tobacco which had somehow got separated from its owner, the Ranger inquired, "Rattler, who is that there healthy lookin' gal?"

The old cowman tottered to a halt. He solemnly regarded both the girl and the plug, took a hungry bite at the latter, and answered, "Chuck Wagon Sue."

"Huh?"

"Yes, sah, Badger, that there amblin' feather bed is Chuck Wagon Sue."

"Is she the big fella's gal?"

Rattlesnake Runnels examined both sides of the plug. "Yep, one of 'em. Course he's got wimmin scattered here and yander, but she's his favoryte Whirlwind gal."

Badger scratched the back of his neck. "Hell of a name for a woman, I'd say."

Rattler rolled an owlish eye at Sue. "No foolin', and Sue's a hell of a woman in mo' ways than one—all of 'em good."

"Wouldn't be at all surprised," conceded the Ranger. "Reckon they named her Chuck Wagon 'cause it takes mighty nigh a whole wagon sheet to kivver her."

Rattlesnake Runnels chewed away blissfully. He studiously turned the plug in his hand, then shoved it into his hip pocket with the air of a man who had just made a momentous decision and felt no pangs of remorse.

"No, sah, as a fella says—Sue done earned that there name by the sweat of her brow on the field of honah," he declaimed. "It's like this. Up to Mobeetie a while back, barkeep that wa'n't nothin' but breath and britches nohow, made the mistake of sorta intimatin' to Sue that she looked to him 'bout like the south end of a chuck wagon a-headin' no'th. That was

bad, 'cause it jest happened that Sue was off her feed and a mite techy. So she up and busted the daggoned saloon to smithereens, and what I mean—she done rocked

that there windy barman to sleep with his own bungstarter!"

The lanky old twister teetered back on his heels. "Yes, sah, as I was fixin' to say—they ain't nobody got a better right than Sue to pack that there Chuck Wagon brand."

Badger laughingly admitted there wasn't any room for argument on that score.

HE and Rattler stopped at the door to the small room. From there they watched the others spread Big Whiskers out on a buffalo robe on the floor, since there wasn't anything else long enough to hold him. Sue took a cushion from a rocking chair and placed it under his head with all the tenderness of a mother putting a child in its cradle.

Badger glanced up at his tall companion. "Her size and shape, regardless—she *is* a motherly sort of a gal, ain't she?"

Old Rattler looked on with solemn approval while Sue wiped blood from Big Whiskers' eye with her own handkerchief. "Motherly as hell!" he declared. "And likewise, she's a chuck wagon plumb through and through."

"Reckon I don't quite ketch on."

The hard-bitten old boss of the Crazy R tugged at his mustache and drawled, "Well sah—hongry fellas go to Sue for grub jest like she was a chuck wagon. If she's got a dollah, they git it. And if she ain't, Sue waltzes 'em across the street to the Chink's. Soon as ever Old John Chinee gits sight of her, he starts right in to slicin' bacon and a-crackin' aigs wuss'n if Satan was on his tail a-bellerin' for grub. Fact is, John has been plumb charitable ever sence the time Sue mighty nigh strangled him with his own pigtail when he allowed he wouldn't feed a hongry friend of her'n 'cause the pore cuss didn't have nary a cent."

Badger laughed. He swore he'd have to get acquainted with Chuck Wagon Sue.

Through the crowd that now drifted about the room as though nothing had happened, he caught sight of Blizzard with Red hanging to his arm. Evidently she was introducing the tall Ranger around, much to his embarrassment.

"Betcha that there Red gal is right charitable, too," remarked Badger. "Behaves like she was."

Old Rattler pursed his lips and pondered the matter. "Mmmm-huh! Some folks says that she'll chase a dollah through hell so damned fast Old Baldy won't never scorch a tail feather."

The Ranger chuckled, and the cowman added cautiously, "But mind you—I ain't never been through hell with Red and a dollah, so I cain't say for shore."

Just then a wiry little man with a white beard and long, white hair, came bustling through the front door carrying a weathered and battered medicine case. A black cigar aggressively thrust itself out of his beard, and a black Stetson rode well over on one side of his white head. His Prince Albert coat reached almost to the tops of his high-heeled boots.

EVIDENTLY Doc was popular. Men and women greeted him with familiarity, and many friendly jibes were tossed his way. Keeping a severe face, he snapped crusty answers and tramped on to the rear; but his sharp blue eyes held a pleasant twinkle.

Standing by the door to the small room, Rattlesnake Runnels squared his shoulders and saluted with solemn dignity. "Doctah—how are you-all this fine, Texas evenin', sah?"

The brusque little man paused long enough to sweep the old twister's lanky frame with a caustic eye. "So it ain't you that got busted? Too bad! I been hopin' it was."

He brushed past Badger and the cowman without another word.

The men around Big Whiskers got out

of his way, but Chuck Wagon Sue kept her seat on the floor at the wounded man's head.

Doc barked at her. "Get out from under foot, Sue, befo' I tromp on you!"

Although twice his size, she moved aside in a hurry.

The doctor pulled off his gloves and deftly made a quick examination, from time to time snorting into his whiskers.

Sue watched every move he made. In a moment she inquired fearfully, "Doc, is he going to die?"

An irritating question to an overworked frontier practitioner to whom anything less than a mortal wound was a mere scratch.

Doctor Furnace glared at her. "Die, hell!" he growled. "Why, woman, he ain't even hurt."

While opening his case, he continued, "I've always said that the only way to kill men like him is to rip 'em apart and scatter 'em a-plenty. Even then, if it's light of the moon and you don't plant 'em quick, the pieces are shore to crawl back together again and the cuss will be ornerier than ever."

Most of the men laughed. The Professor smiled with his eyes.

"Doc, fix him up proper," he said quietly. "Miss Constance pays the bill."

"Don't you reckon I knew that already?" snarled Doc. "You rannies never pay yo' doctah bills. If it wasn't for her, I'd starve."

With an eye on the wound, he chewed viciously on his cigar. "This fella's hide is so damned tough, betcha I bust every needle I got. Wish I'd fetched an awl and some whang leather."

Chuck Wagon viewed the doctor's preparations with a critical eye. Presently she demanded, "Ain't you going to do nothing to bring him to?"

Doc shook his head. "Nope. Ain't got time. Slivers Sanders just hit town all in a lather, and I'm a-ridin' to his place fifty miles down the valley. Slivers swears his old lady is due to drop twins befo' sunup."

Big Whiskers dozed peacefully through it all, until Doc was putting on the finishing touches by pinning the bandage. Then he jerked his head and groaned, and Doc jabbed a safetypin into his thumb and cussed.

"Damn the big bugger! Wish I'd fetched an ax."

Nevertheless, he carefully inspected the bandage—adjusting it here and there—and profanely warned Sue not to let the freighter leave town until the injury had received further treatment.

Before the doctor reached the door, Big Whiskers rolled over and painfully lifted himself to all-fours. There he stopped, shaking his head like a wounded bear and mumbling a string of curses that steadily grew stronger and more coherent.

Doc Furnace looked back and snorted. "Can't kill 'em. Ought to hobble the cuss, 'cause he's shore to rip his bandages off befo' mawnin'. Sue, roll him into his blankets with a quart of good liquor, then trust that the Good Lawd puts him to sleep."

EVERYBODY tramped out, leaving Chuck Wagon alone with her freighter. Badger hoped she put him to bed right away. He wanted to talk the situation over with Blizzard before again meeting this big fellow who knew "Buffalo." So many things had happened in such a short space of time, Badger had no idea where they stood or what they ought to do next. Moreover, Cherokee Lou had left his mind in something of a fog.

So he swaggered across to the table at which Red and his pardner were finishing their wine. The music was starting up; but at the moment, he felt that he never again wanted to dance with anyone other than Cherokee Lou.

"Howdy, Big Stranger," said the girl

tartly. "Now that Miss Constance has dropped you like a wormy apple, maybe you'll remember what you promised me."

Badger laughed and grabbed her arm. "Shore thing, Red! Let's go."

Blizzard gave his friend a steady look, and drawled, "For a wonder, you got the right idee. Play the red. I calc'late it's a shore winner."

The girl smiled sweetly. Before he could do anything about it, she planted a kiss on the high bridge of his nose. Badger roared. Blizzard almost fell off his chair, dodging after it was too late. He turned a shade of red that made his ears look larger and his nose longer, and got to his feet awkwardly.

"Goin' to take a peek at the hosses," he stammered. Gazing reproachfully at Red, he continued to Badger, "Take keer, or this here side-windin' gal is shore to hang yo' hide on the fence."

Blizzard had no intention of visiting their horses. He went on a hunt for the sheriff, and found him in the Canadian.

Stannard was leaning on the end bar, stroking Josephus and talking to one of the bartenders. The Ranger watched a stud game until the bartender got busy, then he ambled over to the pudgy little sheriff.

"Right smart play tonight, 'pears to me," he began. "Is this yo' reg'lar Saturday night crowd?"

King's round face beamed in the friendliest manner. "Just about. Of course, the shooting we had makes the boys sort of hang around to talk it over."

"Uh-huh," agreed Blizzard, leaning his rifle against the bar beside him. "And I wouldn't be at all surprised if we had another'n befo' long."

The sheriff's hand paused in the middle of Josephus' back. "What's that?"

"Yep. More gunplay and mebbe a leetle knifin' to boot. Cain't tell for shore."

King stared intently up into the tall Ranger's solemn face. "Are you and that wild hyena pardner of yours getting ready to start another rumpus?"

Blizzard contrived to look slightly injured. "Not us! Me and him never do start nothin'."

"Then what are you driving at?"

Thoughtfully scraping his long jaw, Blizzard gazed off down the room; but he watched King from the corner of his eye. "I calc'late they'll be a woman, or wimmin at the bottom of it. Most generally is."

"What women and what man?"

"Cain't never be daid shore 'bout wimmin," drawled the lanky Ranger, "but I'll gamble on who is the man."

"I'm listening," snapped the sheriff.

Blizzard's keen eyes searched Stannard's face. He spoke sharply. "It's Jake Rupper. Any objections?"

King Stannard was a poker player with a reputation. But he now confronted a man who had elevated the game of reading the other fellow's emotions to something approaching an exact science, whether he be across a table or at the heel of a gun.

The sheriff didn't want Jake wiped out!

HE DROPPED his eyes to the large diamond that sparkled on his chubby hand. And his eyes followed the diamond while the hand moved slowly over the cat's fur from ears to tail.

"Rupper isn't a bad fellow," he declared in words that obviously were selected with care. "I haven't any idea what it's all about, but as long as the boys do their killing fair and square, open and aboveboard, I never horn in."

"Calc'lated you wouldn't," said Blizzard with a drawl.

"Of course you understand," continued King without glancing up, "I can't be responsible for what Fatty does. You fellows have just about ruined him in Whirlwind. He'll never live it down. And he's stubborn, so you're bound to

have more trouble with him regardless of what anyone may do to stop it."

Blizzard snorted.

The sheriff gave him a sidelong glance and added, "But if you expect trouble with Jake, and if you've got any folks, it might be a good idea to tell me where they get their mail."

King thoughtfully scratched Josephus between the ears, and the cat purred like a cat without a worry in the world. The Ranger envied the beast. He had plenty of worries, and this oily little sheriff was one of them.

A word picked up here and there in the Wild Rose together with what he had learned from Red, indicated that Stannard was interested in politics to the exclusion of everything else. However, from experience Blizzard had learned that politics made an excellent cloak beneath which to hide a multitude of more infamous iniquities.

THE Ranger figured this little sport was as deceiving as Panhandle weather sign, so he suggested that they sit in a game of draw. He held to the theory that, influenced by the temptations, vicissitudes, and delights of poker, any man would occasionally let you catch a glimpse of the stuff he had in him.

Accordingly, some time later, Blizzard raked in a large pot and grinned across the table at Stannard.

King stepped out of character and swore with surprising ferocity. "Never saw the beat of it! Here I go and draw one card and ride a bob-tail plumb to the clouds, and you jog along raising me with nothing but a pair of queens. Hell man! What made you think those queens were any good?"

Blizzard expertly stacked his checks. Presently he allowed dryly, "They's so damned onsartin and deceivin', I won't bet a white chip on the ladies onless I calc'late they's some funny business a-goin' on. Then I back 'em to the limit, 'cause they cain't be beat at funny business."

Which showed what he had on his mind.

He wondered where Badger was and what he had learned, if anything. Ought to go find the ornery cuss. Might have to snake him out of quicksand or somethin'. But this was a stiff game, he was four hundred odd ahead, and his poker kept them in spending money.

Moreover, this was an interesting game. Blizzard figured he had learned a heap of things. In the first place, he'd swear that the nice, soft little sheriff had iron in his blood and cussedness in his heart.

And in the second place, he knew for a fact that the breed killer from The Nations had been trying his damnedest to pick a quarrel with him ever since he sat down. As a matter of principle, he was perfectly willing to quarrel, provided it didn't interfere with his job. But this was once when he figured he couldn't afford to fight just for the fun of the thing. So he sidestepped and hedged and took a-plenty in the interest of peace. Although he recognized his swarthy tormenter from descriptions that had reached the Rangers, the fellow couldn't know him and Blizzard smelled a rat. There was somebody or something behind it all. But killing the breed wouldn't throw light on the situation, so he picked up his cards.

Sitting at his left, a Panhandle horse thief had dealt him four little spades and a diamond. Under the gun, the breed killer made a small bet and the next three men saw him. Blizzard almost neglected to raise before the draw on his four little spades, because from somewhere down the street rolled a mighty bellow that sounded like a bull a-talkin' fight. And it told him that Badger's boots were a-poundin' dirt and kickin' holes in the air; so he boosted it the limit and everybody dropped out.

The cards fluttered down again.

Through the front door came the violent rattle of spurs, laughter, the snapping of fingers, and the rhythmic thump of boots, announcing that a heavy man was doing a double-shuffle on the porch. And the next moment Badger swaggered in, arm-in-arm with Jake Rupper!

They were escorted by several other exuberant spirits who no doubt had been making the rounds with them, proud to be seen accompanying Jake—the underworld's most popular man, and Badger—who had salivated Whirlwind's most vicious killer.

Blizzard glanced from the door to the sheriff.

King laughed. "Which goes to prove that you're a hell of a trouble prophet."

The Ranger mournfully shook his head. "Nope. Proves I was daid right. Jest you hold yo' hosses."

The newcomers were in a festive mood—noisy, and more or less unsteady on their pins. Blizzard took another good look and held back a grin. He knew Badger wasn't drunk. Badger never got drunk, but he could do a larrupin' good job of pretending to be. And Blizzard would gamble that Jake was every bit as sober as Badger; so each of the celebrators was doing his level best to fool the other.

Hat on the extreme back of his head, boots stepping high and wide and coming down hard, Badger weaved an uncertain course for the poker table, howling greetings to men he didn't know.

He fetched Blizzard a terrific wallop between the shoulder blades, crushed his Stetson down over his ears, and roared, "Perk up, Old Hoss Face! Our days of ridin' with our chins on our shoulders a-dodgin' the law, is over and plumb forgot. We done refawmed and snared us some jobs."

Blizzard jerked off his hat and reshaped it. As soon as he got his breath he growled, "Git away from me, you big drunk, befo' you snare yo'self ten inches of steel!"

Everybody laughed. Badger went on eloquently, "Yes, sah, gents! Me and him is a-goin' to nussin' cows for the C bar N. And what I mean—this is a great day for Whirlwind County. She's done gethered herself a pair of high-rollin' sinners for to fight her battles, drink her likker, and love her wimmin!"

"And to—hup!—dec'rate her liveoaks—hic!—if this keeps up!" muttered Rattlesnake Runnels, who was trying to snooze on a chair tilted against the wall.

Blizzard tossed in his cards and stacked his chips before the banker. "I'm a-cashin' in. Gotta git this here crazy elephant into his blankets befo' somebody butchers him for his tushes, or jest to stop his bellerin'."

After a nicely calculated amount of argument, verbal threats, and physical exertion had been expended by each of them, Badger suffered his pardner to lead him away.

As they set an uncertain course toward the hotel, Blizzard inquired softly but anxiously, "Find out anything?"

"Plenty! That there Red gal—"

"Be keerful! Every last thing from hitchin' racks to stars in this here Whirlwind country has got ears. We'll make our talk when we're plumb away from town."

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KINGSWOOD :: SURREY

Morrissy of the New York City Police Opined that the Police of Haiti Had Done a Good Job Since the Marines Left

STOP SHOOTING AT ME

By DONALD BARR CHIDSEY

Author of "Diamonds on an Island," "The Murderer's Left Hand," etc.

THE sun was blaring red, and airport officials were muttering something about floodlights, when the plane finally did appear.

The plane swung over the Cul-de-Sac, circled the city, and came down, fan-shaping the water in delicate white. It turned, taxied toward the dock. Negroes in rowboats prodded it into exact place. Other Negroes ran out the light steel, bridge-like gangplank.

There were three passengers. The first two were local businessmen. The third was John F. X. Morrissy, who was big, impassive, assured, handsome, with almost white hair, an almost white mustache neatly clipped, and immaculate clothes. His cheeks were pink, his eyes were blue like the blue eyes of a sailor. He moved slowly, with dignity, but not ponderously. He weighed close to two hundred, but he wasn't fat.

A smallish dapper fellow in the uniform of the Garde d'Haiti clicked heels together, bowed.

He had a beautiful black mustache. His manners were perfect, his English nearly so.

"Capitaine Morrissy of New York, *n'est-ce pas?*"

"Know me, huh?"

"Everybody knows of Capitaine Morrissy."

"Yeah, it's great to be famous. Sorry I'm late. Head winds all the way down."

"It is an honor that you should come in person to take away this prisoner. It is a high honor!"

"Well, I thought I needed a little vacation."

The Garde extended his hand.

"Lieutenant Senac, at your service, Captaine."

"Glad to meet you, Lieutenant. You boys did a nice piece of work, grabbing that baby. You deserve a lot of credit."

They shook hands.

"Shall we, perhaps, go first to my home and have a little drink?" Senac suggested.

"Now there's an idea," said John F. X. Morrissy.

THEY sat on a veranda, sipping something which was tall and cold and made of rum. Morrissy would have preferred beer but he was too polite to say so. He realized that he should treat these Haitians with great respect. After all, they had pinched Skitty Cather, out of a clear sky, when half the cops in the States were running around looking for him; and they'd had sense enough to take his fingerprints and wire their classification to Washington, to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, which had promptly passed on the information to New York.

"A nice piece of work," Morrissy said again. "Somebody tipped you, I suppose? That's the way it usually is."

Senac nodded gravely.

"A tourist. He telephoned. He said he had seen a man who was like the pictures he had seen of Monsieur Cather just before he left the United States. He said the man was in the back room of the Army Bar talking with another *blanc*."

"Huh?"

"Talking with another white man."

"Oh."

"He would not give us his name, this tourist who called. And we did not press him to do so."

"Good idea."

"We went immediately to the Army Bar and as we arrived Monsieur Cather was coming out. We arrested him."

"Who was the guy he was with?"

"Monsieur?"

"The other *blanc?*"

"Ah! Him we did not find. It must be that he heard us arresting Monsieur Cather and went out quiet by a back door."

Beyond the wall the street sounds continued—natives shouting their wares, beating their burros, frantically tooting the horns of their *lalignes*. But there was silence on the veranda, and in the house behind the two men. The red sun had plunged into the sea, and it was very dark. The air was thick with the fragrance of bougainvillea.

"Well, it was a nice piece of work," Morrissy said for the third time. "From all I hear about you boys, you certainly know how to run things here since the Marines got out."

"The United States Marine," Senac said precisely, "did much good here—ah, yes! The Marine organize the Garde d'Haiti. We owe much to them. Very much."

"Well, they seem to have organized you right. This rat Skitty Cather is about as nasty a little crook as I've ever known. He was always a hard man to get anything on. But when he got surprised in an apartment job a couple of weeks ago, and bashed in the lady's skull to keep her from screaming, he must have got panicky. He left us a practically perfect set of prints. Not like him at all. Yeah, he must have got panicky."

"He had very little money. Thirty-four dollar. And there was no more in his room at the Grande Hotel."

"And you never found out who it was he'd been talking with?" Morrissy crushed out his cigarette, finished his drink. "Well, anyway, we've got Skitty. Which is the important thing." He rose. "That was a

swell drink, Lieutenant. Now let's get over to the hoosegow. I'm sure Skitty'll be glad to know I'm here."

INSIDE the house a telephone rang. A white-coated servant appeared and said something in Creole. Senac excused himself, after an impeccable bow. He went into the house with neat, dandified steps.

Morrissy heard him talking for a minute, but he talked in French of which Morrissy understood not one word. The lieutenant seemed excited, Morrissy lighted another cigarette, sighed, strolled over to veranda rail and stood there looking down at the dim, shadowed flowers.

Presently Senac returned. His face was very grave.

"Monsieur le Capitaine, that was a call from the Commandante of the Garde d'Haiti."

"The big shot himself, huh?"

"Monsieur, the Commandante has a request to make of you, and I am asked to make it for him."

"Well," Morrissy said cautiously, "I always like to help out, wherever I can."

"Capitaine Morrissy, you are a very famous detective. You have captured many, many murderers, *n'est-ce pas?*"

Morrissy shrugged.

"Well, I've caught my share. But remember, we've *got* a lot more murderers in the first place, up in New York."

"Ah, true! And so you, Monsieur le Capitaine, have a great experience with them. You know what to do. Here in Haiti we can handle our own people, yes. When they steal, when they kill, we arrest them. But racketeers we do not know."

"You're lucky. What's all this about anyway?"

"Monsieur, have you ever heard of Ellsworth A. Edgar?"

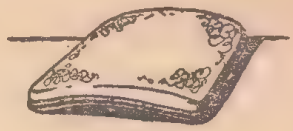
"Can't say as I have. American?"

"Ah, *oui!* But he lives here in Haiti, in a big mansion on the road to Petionville. He is a very, very rich man."

"Uh-huh?"

"*Mon Capitaine,* a half hour ago Monsieur Ellsworth A. Edgar was brutally murdered!"

Morrissy blew smoke through his nose, flicked ash off his cigarette, stared out over the garden. It wasn't a pose. Murders never startled John F. X. Morrissy, hadn't for years. He had no interest in them except when they were in his city.



"That so? Sorry to hear it. If this place is anything like the States, I know what it means for you boys when a rich guy gets bumped. It means everybody will be blaming the cops."

Senac bowed. It seemed to Morrissy a silly thing to do.

"Monsieur le Capitaine, I have been instructed by the Commandante to ask you if you will not lend us your great experience and skill so that we might—"

"Now wait a minute! You mean you want men to help you in the investigation?"

"Ah, yes!"

Morrissy said, politely but with firmness, "Ah, *no!*" He caught his cigarette on a long, well manicured forefinger, and snicked it into the garden. It fell with a tiny shower of sparks. "I don't like to be disagreeable, Lieutenant. You guys have been swell about this Cather business, and I want you to believe that I'm grateful. But taking over a murder investigation is another matter."

"But with Monsieur's great skill—"

"In the first place, I haven't any authority to stick around here at the expense of the City of New York. I've got to take my prisoner and fix up extradition and clear out. In the second place, hauling me into the case would make a lot of local sleuths sore. And you can't blame them! They'd get all the work and I'd get all the glory, no matter how it came out. And in

the third place, that stuff about my great skill is nine-tenths baloney. I'm not modest—I think I'm good, as far as my own job is concerned—but I'm no Sherlock Holmes. You know yourself, Lieutenant, that police work's a local matter. Here in Haiti I wouldn't be a bit of use. I don't know French, I don't know Creole, I don't know my way around. The dumbest rookie you've got in the Garde is better equipped to work on this thing than I am."

He shook his head.

"No. If I really thought it would help you out, I'd be glad to look things over. But I know it wouldn't. My job here is to get Skitty Cather. So let's beat it over to the jail, huh?"

"There is a second matter, Monsieur."

"Yeah?"

"It seems there was another murder committed only about an hour before Monsieur Edgar was killed."

"Oh-oh! Tough day for cops, isn't it?"

"This man killed was a member of the Garde d'Haiti, a jail warden. The Garde has charge of all the jails here, you understand, Monsieur? This warden was stabbed to death with a kitchen fork and his uniform was stripped from him and he was found in an empty cell. The prisoner in that cell, the murderer, had escaped. An hour later, maybe less, somebody broke into the home of Monsieur Ellsworth Edgar. Monsieur Edgar was dressing for dinner and the servants were all out. He must have heard an intruder, for he was found only half dressed. There was a projecting nail on the sill of the window through which the intruder entered or left or both. There was a shred of khaki cloth clinging to this nail. It smelled of the same disinfectant we use in the jail."

"So?" muttered Morrissy. Then, suddenly alarmed, he grabbed Senac's arm. "Say, you're not telling me that——?"

"The prisoner who escaped, Monsieur, was, I regret to say, Skitty Cather."

There was a long silence. Then Lieutenant Senac, leaning closer, asked very softly:

"Would Monsieur le Capitaine care to change his mind and go with me to the home of the late Ellsworth A. Edgar?"

Morrissy positively snorted.

"Hell, yes! And right now!"

IT WAS a show place, resembling, a little, Mount Vernon — but Mount Vernon in an incongruous setting of date palms, coconut palms, breadfruit trees, poinciana, tuberoses, and brash orchids. Dramatic in itself, it was also situated dramatically. As you went toward Petionville the road curved sharply right, and you supposed, unless you knew better, that you were going to go straight up to Ellsworth A. Edgar's mansion. The driveway, that is, looked like a continuation of the road itself—and in fact it was a better piece of pavement.

So the house stood there, large and white and handsome, awesomely arrogant, sure of itself, on a hill. Tourists had it pointed out to them and they were told who Ellsworth E. Edgar was. No resident of Haiti needed to be told this.

He had been handsome and arrogant too. Even though he was dead, and upside down, even though his face was smeared with sticky, drying, blackening blood, he looked cruel and strong, a man who would take no back-talk from anybody.

Yet certainly it was an unlovely corpse. It occupied the top six or seven steps of a formal Colonial staircase, in full view as you entered by the front door. The head was down, the feet up. The corpse was clad in a dress shirt, no collar, no trousers, black silk socks, bedroom slippers. One stud was in place, but there was no collar-button and the cuffs contained no links. The top of the head was mostly blood. The eyes were open. One arm extended lower than the head, and on the step below this hand there was a blood-smeared, steel, heavy golf club.

Members of the Garde stood all around—the staircase was wide, showy like the house itself—and one of them was dusting fingerprint powder on the handle of the golf club with a small camel's-hair brush.

Morrissy went up the steps as far as the golf club. He stood on that step, fists on hips, and rubbered out his lips while he stared for perhaps a full minute at the body. He did not touch it. He turned and went down the steps again, and Lieutenant Senac went with him.

Morrissy said, "All right. Now where's this piece of cloth torn off on a nail?"

Senac spoke in Creole to a guardsman, who led them into the large square library. There was a woman there, young and very lovely, seated, staring at nothing with eyes which were no longer wet. A guardsman stood on either side of her. Morrissy paid her no attention but went directly to the window.

The window was open; it had been jimmied. The piece of torn khaki too was evident on the nail. It was small, a long triangle in shape, pointed outward.

"This hasn't been touched?"

"No, Monsieur. Only sniffed at. Two wardens from the jail have sniffed it, and they both swear it is the same disinfectant they use in the jail. So far as anybody knows that disinfectant is not used anywhere else here."

Morrissy shook his head.

"Skitty Cather never jimmied that window. That's an amateur job, and Skitty's one of the slickest crooks in the business. The way that cloth is, it looks as though it was torn while somebody was going out. *That's* conceivable. Skitty might have got panic-stricken, the way he was after bumping off that dame in New York. But he certainly never opened this window."

"Possibly he lacked a proper tool?"

"Skitty," Morrissy said decisively, "could raise a window like this with his fingernails, and never leave a mark."

Senac suggested, "He needed clothes and money, so he broke into what anybody could see is a rich man's house."

"If he wanted to do that, he'd break into the first house he came to. He was a white man, dressed in a Garde d'Haiti uniform. He'd have to move fast, whatever he did. Do you mean to tell me he'd take the chance of walking all the way out here? Why, this must be three miles from the jail!"

Two Garde officers entered the library and started to question the woman. They were polite about it, but insistent. She didn't look at them. She answered their questions briefly, in a listless voice.

MORRISSY drifted over, listened for a while. Or rather, he watched. They talked in French which he could not understand, so he simply watched the woman. She was lying, he decided. She was trying very hard to seem at ease, unruffled. She leaned back in her chair, and her hands were limp in her lap. But she was pressing her feet down hard on the rug; Morrissy could see the muscles of her calves standing out as a result of the pressure.

Senac whispered, "It is Mrs. Ellsworth A. Edgar. The widow."

Morrissy only nodded, still watching the woman. She lifted her eyes, saw him.

"You look like an American? Perhaps you can tell these men that there's no sense in asking me all these questions over and over again, because I've told them everything I know."

"What have you told them, for instance?"

"Simply that I was in the living room, the other side of the entrance hall over there, with Mr. Chartey and Mr. Bond. My husband was upstairs, dressing. At least, I had *supposed* that's what he was doing. But then suddenly we heard him yell something—I couldn't tell you just what—and we heard him yell something

—I couldn't tell you just what—and we heard him thump down on the stairs. We rushed out to the hall, but we didn't see anybody else—nobody but poor Ellsworth and he was already dead."

"Who else was in the house?"

"Nobody. I'd given the servants a day and night off because of the fete in the city. Some kind of native holiday."

"I see. Now the man who killed your husband—do you suppose he ran out by way of the front door?"

"He couldn't have done that or we would have seen him. We were standing at the far end of the living room—it's just like this room only on the other side of the house—and from there we could see the front door."

"If you happened to look."

"But we *did* look! As soon as we heard Ellsworth shout we all three of us whirled around and stood staring in the direction of the hall. We didn't run out there, as we should have done. We were too startled.

"But certainly we would have seen anybody who left the house by way of the front door."

"Is there a back door that could be reached from that hall?"

"Not from the hall, no."

"Then the murderer must have either come in here and exited through that window, or else he went upstairs?"

"He didn't run upstairs, because Fred —Mr. Chartey—ran up there himself a few moments later, and he searched it thoroughly. The windows were all open, the way they always are up there, but none of the screens had been touched."

"Who is this Mr. Chartey, by the way? And this Mr. Bond?"

"Friends. Guests. Mr. Chartey is an Englishman. Comes from Jamaica, but he visits Port-au-Prince several times a month on business. Mr. Bond is a gentleman I met in Miami last year. He happens to be visiting Haiti, just sightseeing."

"They house guests?"

"No-no. Just dinner. Mr. Chartey's staying at the Rex and I believe Mr. Bond is too. Not together. In fact, they only met one another here this afternoon."

"I see. Thank you," said Morrissy. "As for the questions these boys ask, I'm afraid I can't help you there. Asking questions is a habit cops have when there's been a murder."

AS THEY turned away, Senac said in an undertone, "She did not tell you that she and her husband had been quarreling lately. It is an open secret. A week ago they had a loud and violent argument at a function at the American Club, which embarrassed everybody."

Morrissy only grunted. He was making for the hall.

"Also I understand," Senac whispered, "that Madame has no money in her own right. But Monsieur, of course, had much."

"She could have killed him," Morrissy admitted, "but she probably didn't. A golf club isn't the sort of thing a woman would pick as a weapon — unless she snatched it on the spur of the moment. That stick with which Edgar was conked is a short heavy No. 8 niblick, probably the best one in the bag for that purpose. It's the kind of thing an amateur prowler might pick up for an emergency. I mean, if he knew something about golf."

In the hallway Morrissy almost collided with a smallish but very heavy-set man in a tan Palm Beach suit. This man had a thin twisted mouth, almost bloodless lips, a nose waxen and very thin, and furtive eyes. He was cocky, smart, sleek, citified.

Morrissy said softly, "Well, I'll be damned! So *you're* the Mr. Bond from Miami?"

Bond's mouth twisted, his eyebrows got very low.

He snarled, "What are you doing here?"

"I'll ask questions, not answer them." Morrissy's voice was icy. "And when I find a filthy little rat of a private detective who's nothing better than a crook—when I find him in a house where somebody's just been murdered—"

Bond got close, thrust his face almost into Morrissy's.

"Say listen: If you start telling these local boys—"

"I don't have to tell them anything about you. I'll give them the name of my friend Sergeant Morton of Miami, and *he'll* tell them what kind of a reputation you've got in your home town. After that they can do what they like about it. Now get your mongrel's face away from me. I never did care for haliatosis."

"So you think I'm up to something crooked?"

"When were you ever up to anything else?"

"Now wait a minute, Captain. This is perfectly straight here. I met Mrs. Edgar in Miami Beach a year ago. She was staying at the Roney, and visiting friends. She lost some jewelry, or thought she did, and she called me in. Before I even got over there she'd found the stuff again.

"It had just fallen behind something. So as to make up for my trouble she offered me a drink and we sat around and talked for a while. I said Haiti was a place I'd always wanted to see, and she said if I ever did go there to look her up. And the other day I found myself a little ahead of the game, so I came here for a vacation. Got in yesterday. I called Mrs. Edgar and she invited me here to dinner tonight. Well, I'd come, and she'd introduced me to this Englishman, and we were standing in the other room talking, just the three of us, when her husband got clouted. I *didn't* see who did it."

Morrissy said passionately, "Boosh-wah!"

LIEUTENANT SENAC hovered nearby, and Garde officers were crossing and recrossing the hall and going up and down the staircase at the head of which the body of Ellsworth A. Edgar still sprawled grotesquely upside down. Bond sank his voice.

"That's absolutely all, Captain, except I'd like to tell you one or two things I happened to notice. How 'bout stepping back underneath these steps, at the end of the hall?"

"Why not tell me right here?"

Bond's eyes moved back and forth. There was always a cat-like quality about this man.

"Some of these babies might hear it and get me wrong. Some of them can understand English, you know."

"You haven't got anything real to tell me," Morrissy said, "but I'll go with you just out of curiosity."

Nobody followed them, and in the small windowless room underneath the staircase nobody could see them.

"I *have* got something to tell you," announced Bond. He held a small keen thin knife so that its point was no more than an inch from John F. X. Morrissy's large pink throat. "And that is that if you don't keep your nose out of my business I'm going to use this. Savvy?"

Morrissy was astounded. Certainly it was not like Everett Bond to carry a knife, of all things. Morrissy later learned that the thing was a letter opener which belonged to the Edgars. Bond had picked it up unthinkingly. But it was sharp, and bright, and it was breathlessly close to Morrissy's throat.

Morrissy started to laugh.

"Well, that's more than I'd expected you to tell me. So you really have got some game here, and you're afraid it'll be spoiled by the presence of an American cop who knows the way you punks operate? Well now, that's very interesting. I'll have to remember that. Meanwhile, put that toy away before you hurt yourself with it."

"I'll put it away when I'm good and ready, after I've told you—"

"I haven't got time to listen to any more crap from you."

Morrissy stepped backward, dodged to one side. He kicked Bond in the shins. Bond squealed, doubling. Then Morrissy punched him in the jaw, a long, full-bodied uppercut. He was something close to fifty years old, was John F. X. Morrissy, but he hadn't forgotten how to hit.

Bond straightened, swaying. Morrissy punched him again, a straight right-hander to the point of the chin. And Bond went down.

Guardsmen came hurrying. Lieutenant Senac was especially solicitous.

"Shall we arrest him, Monsieur le Capitaine?"

"I wouldn't. He's constitutionaly incapable of telling the truth, but he's got enough cheap cunning not to lie in the same way twice. You'd never get anything out of him." He wiped his hands, then carefully put the handkerchief back into his breast pocket. "Let's have a little chat with this other baby."

FRED CHARTEY was emphatically English. He was a good-looking fellow — peaches-and-cream complexion, sandy toothbrush mustache, stiff sandy hair perfectly combed. He was tall and well set-up. He was perhaps thirty years old. Though he wore a white linen suit, it seemed, on him, to be tweed. He had blue outraged eyes and his mouth, too, wore a perpetually hurt expression.

He spoke only English. This was perhaps because he knew no other language; but whatever the reason, he gave the impression that it was because he considered it beneath his dignity to speak anything else except on strictly informal occasions.

"Now see here. I suppose you chaps know your business and all that, but you might show a little more feeling for Mrs. Edgar. The poor girl has suffered a terrible blow."

Morrissy asked quietly, "Do you know Mrs. Edgar well?"

Chartey stared at him, disapproving eyes wide open.

"Known her for years. Her husband too, poor chap."

"Did you know this man Bond, of Miami?"

"I was presented to him this evening. I had never met him before that, no."

"Had you ever heard Mrs. Edgar mention him?"

"Not that I recall."

Morrissy dropped out of the questioning for a while, and Garde officers continued it, Senac being the interpreter. Morrissy, however, came in once more, briefly.

"Mr. Chartey, do I understand that you were invited here to dinner tonight?"

"Yes, sir."

"Thank you."

It was necessary for Senac to remain, but Morrissy said he wanted dinner, a shower, a change of clothes. Also he wanted to be alone for a while. He refused Senac's invitation to stay at the lieutenant's house. "I keep crazy hours. You wouldn't want me around." But he accepted an offer to use Senac's car.

He turned at the door for a last grim look at what until recently was Ellsworth A. Edgar. The corpse had not been moved. It still rested precariously on the upper steps, as though the slightest nudge would send it tumbling and bumping to the bottom. The right arm was still extended and seemed to appeal for assistance.

On the veranda steps Morrissy encountered a mild-faced, mild-mannered little man with nose glasses and an "Oh, dear!" look of bewilderment and concern. The man had just scampered out of a Ford roadster. His pale face gleamed with perspiration.

"Is this true, that Ells Edgar has been murdered?"

Morrissy nodded his head gravely.

"Couple of hours ago. In fact, just about seven o'clock."

"Horrible! Horrible! *Seven* o'clock? Why, I was in here myself talking to him not much before that time. Around half past six."

"That so? You knew him?"

"Oh, intimately. We used to play golf together, and he used to save stamps for me. I'm a stamp collector, you see." He smiled apologetically. "Ells frequently got letters from different parts of the world, in connection with his business, and he used to save the envelopes for me if he thought there was anything I might be interested in. In fact, that's what I stopped to see him about this evening on my way back from the Club. Only he insisted upon talking golf all the time."

"Oh, he talked golf?"

"Yes. His bag was right there in the hall, and I suppose that suggested it. He'd just come in from the course and was going up to dress for dinner. He was cursing his wife for letting the servants have a day off. There was nobody to carry his bag upstairs, and he took that quite seriously." The little man smiled that apologetic smile. "You know, here in Haiti we get so accustomed to having servants fetch and carry that we never dream of doing anything like that ourselves."

"What did Mr. Edgar say about the clubs?"

"Why, he was telling me about some new ones, and he insisted that I swing one of them to see for myself. I forget which one it was."

"Was there anybody else around at that time?"

"I didn't see anybody. I heard two or three people talking in the living room, but I couldn't distinguish any particular voice."

"That so? Well, you'd better go in and tell the Garde about that. They might be interested."

"But can't you tell me about poor Ells Edgar first? How did it happen?"

"I'd better let them tell you that. I'm not really official here. Just an outsider."

Morrissy nodded, smiled briefly, went on down to Senac's car.

THE Hotel Rex had no hot water, its electric wiring was not concealed, the doors were flimsy, the ceilings peeled, the help was virtually half-witted. Nevertheless, it was one of the best hotels in Port-au-Prince. It did have nice balconies; and John F. X. Morrissy, about midnight, sat on one of these, smoking a cigarette. He had showered and shaved and dined, and he sat there in black pajamas, enjoying the scent of flowers he couldn't see.

Chartey and Bond were both stopping at the Rex. Chartey indeed occupied a room next to Morrissy's; the American could hear him moving around.

A little earlier Senac had telephoned. The Garde had been working hard but getting nowhere. Chartey, Mrs. Edgar and Everett Bond, who never were really under arrest, had been released. The Edgar servants had all been located and questioned, and finally they too had been released; they all had ironbound alibis.

Only smudged fingerprints, useless for purposes of identification, had been found on the murder instrument.

A description of Skitty Cather had been sent all over the Republic. The harbor, the airports, the Dominican border, the road to Cape Haitien, all were being watched. Garde officers were searching the brothels and late drinking establishments. They were questioning fishermen, on the chance that Skitty might have chartered or tried to charter a smack in which he could escape.

"He must be here, Monsieur! In Port-au-Prince we should find him easily. And if he goes back into the hills, he will be conspicuous as a white man, and one of our outposts will hear about him."

"H-m-m," said John F. X. Morrissy. "By the way, did an excited little fellow with glasses come into the house just after I left?"

"Ah, *oui*. He is a friend of the Edgars. He has been seven-eight years here and all the *blancs* know him. His name is Jeffrey Farjeon. He is an American, quite rich."

"What does he do in life besides collecting stamps?"

"Nothing, Monsieur. Stamps are the great passion of his life. He has a famous collection. He has traveled all over the world."

"All right, Lieutenant. Keep after Skitty."

"We will catch him, Monsieur! Never fear!"

"Hm-m-m," said John F. X. Morrissy.

He went back to the balcony window. He heard Chartey leaving his room; but Morrissy, though he intended to make an unauthorized search of that room, waited for a time, thinking about things.

SKITTY CATHER, he knew, could be a very wraith, a fast-moving, fast-thinking, usually cool-headed fugitive who knew all the tricks of the game. Yet it seemed impossible, as Senac had said, that he could escape. Getting out of Port-au-Prince is not like getting out of New York or Chicago.

There had been others in the house when Edgar was murdered. Mrs. Edgar, for example. She was lying. But it would not be advisable to press her too hard. She was intelligent, level-headed, determined. She was the widow of a rich man, and had influential friends.

The three of them told the same story. Bond and Chartey had been invited to dinner. Confronted with the reminder that there were no servants in the house and so how could they dine there, they shrugged and said they knew nothing about this. Mrs. Edgar, with no apparent loss of self-possession, had said that she forgot this fact when she invited Bond and Chartey, but remembered it before they arrived, and had decided that the four of them would dine out. Where? She did not know. No, she had made no reservation anywhere. She had thought to leave it up to Bond, who as a newly arrived tourist would presumably be eager to see some of the sights.

Fishy, undeniably. But she was not to be shaken from it.

There were other queer things. Why should a woman like Mrs. Edgar invite a notorious private detective like Everett Bond to dinner?

Also, why weren't the guests dressed? Mrs. Edgar herself had been wearing an evening gown. Ellsworth Edgar, at the time he was killed, had been getting into dress clothes. It was possible, even probable that Everett Bond did not own dinner clothes; but it was inconceivable that Fred Chartey, that scrupulously proper, that shriekingly correct Englishman, would show up for dinner clad in linen and a bright-colored necktie. He would as soon appear in swimming trunks. A possible answer was that Chartey, who had come from Kingston by plane the previous day, had wished to economize on baggage.

There would be little sense in asking Chartey this question direct. Chartey probably would tell him to go to hell. So Morrissy had decided to make a search of Chartey's room. He would learn whether the man had brought evening clothes. He might learn something else. It couldn't do any harm. And he was curious about this tall handsome young Englishman with his damn-you-sir stare.

Chartey passed under the balcony, a dim white figure. He strolled out through the gate. He moved like a man who has no errand, who is simply taking a walk.

John F. X. Morrissy kicked off his slippers, went out through the window. He climbed to the balcony outside of Chartey's room. It was risky.

The room was dark. Morrissy intended to keep it that way. He would search with his hands rather than his eyes. He moved slowly, never making a sound. He arms were outstretched.

His right hand touched the back of a man's head. There was a low short grunt. A chair scraped. Morrissy, stepping backward, could not see the man he had touched, but in the dim light from the window—the room was large—he caught a gleam of metal. His leg touched a taboret. He picked it up, threw it to his left, at the same time jumping to the right.

A gun crashed three times, and the taboret was splintered. Morrissy, on hands and knees, saw the flashes, even saw the pistol kick. He could not see the man who held the gun.

A fourth crash followed, but it was not wall-shaking like the others. It was the slamming of a door.

Morrissy was alone in the room.

Downstairs somebody was shouting. Somebody was hammering on something. Somebody was running along the hall.

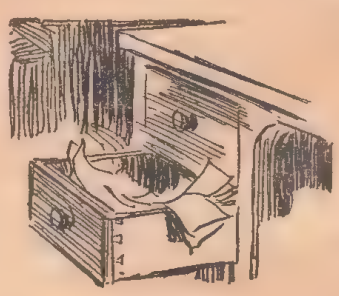
JOHN F. X. MORRISSY went back over that space between the balconies with much more speed than he had shown before. This time it was a decided risk, but he had to take it.

Half a minute later, in pajamas and slippers, he was opening the door of his own room and shouting, "What's going on here, anyway?"

The excited manager, who had heard that Monsieur le Capitaine Mor-ris-see was a celebrated detective in the United States, asked him as a special favor to examine Monsieur Chartey's room before the arrival of the Garde d'Haiti. And Morrissy obliged.

He couldn't, of course, search Chartey's personal effects, as he would have liked to do; but he did open, as though by mistake, the closet door, and one of the things he saw there was a dinner coat.

Chartey himself, who had heard the shots down the street, was furious with



indignation when he returned on the run.

"See here! You've got no right to be searching my room!"

"Correct," said Morrissy. "I just thought I'd take a little look around before the Garde arrives."

"Well, see here! You get out of here instantly, sir!"

Morrissy, with tantalizing deliberation, started to examine three bullet holes in the opposite wall. They looked big.

Everett Bond, who was in the doorway, in company with most of the other guests of the hotel, chuckled.

"Always the sleuth," Bond cried. "Find any cigar ashes to analyze, Captain?"

Morrissy paid no attention.

Chartey, boiling with rage, stalked

across the room, grasped Morrissy by the shoulder, whirled him around. Morrissy was a big man and strong, but so was Chartey.

"See here! Haven't I told you that you can't—"

Morrissy took the hand off his shoulder. His grip was steel. He sidestepped, and twisted. He got the Englishman's arm in a hammerlock. Chartey went pale, gave a tiny squeal of pain, and then was silent. He knew that if he struggled his arm would be broken. His eyes blazed.

"Cut it out," Morrissy said. His voice was low and slow. "You may be absolutely right about an Englishman's home being his castle and all that stuff, but I'm not going to have somebody shooting off artillery right next to where *I* live. Cool off, kid. Nobody's going to violate your privacy."

He pushed the man away and turned again to examine the bullet holes. He heard a gasp, started to turn. He was just in time to catch Chartey's fist on his left ear. It stung. Chartey was no weakling. To give the man credit, he had not done what many another would do in the circumstances. He had not picked up a chair. He had charged without warning, it is true, but his only weapons were his fists.

Which was all right to John F. X. Morrissy.

For perhaps three full minutes they had a grand old time there in that large and sparsely furnished room. There were no rugs upon which to slip. There was very little to get in their way.

Everett Bond cheered sardonically. The other guests yelled for them to stop. The manager danced around them, danced away, waving his arms, screaming for the Garde.

The Garde came—had in fact been coming all the time.

Morrissy caught with a clean one, a full one he brought up almost from the floor. It got Chartey flush on the jaw. Chartey staggered back, hit the bed, teetered. His feet came up. He went right over the bed, right over backward, and thumped to the floor on the far side. He lay still.

Morrissy turned, panting, sweating, his fists clenched. He had not been so sore in years.

"Tut, tut, Monsieur le Capitaine! It is not etiquette, here in Haiti, to knock men over beds. Especially Englishman. They can make so much trouble."

Morrissy forgot his rage and grinned into the friendly, handsome *café au lait* face of Lieutenant Senac.

"Sorry. I guess I lost my head." He waved carelessly. "Clear things up, won't you, and then pop in next door and have a drink while I tell you about it?"

THEY sat there, an hour or so later, when Chartey had been pacified and all was quiet. They sat in the semi-darkness of Morrissy's room. It was pleasant. It had rained a little, and the air was cooler. Morrissy had found some real German beer, while Senac sipped rum and water.

"With your help, Monsieur le Capitaine, we will soon clear up this matter. It is of great importance to the Garde d'Haiti. It is our first truly big murder mystery since the Marines left and the Occupation was ended. You understand we are eager to show the world that we can handle it?"

"Sure, I get that. Only why not cut out that 'Misseer le Capitaine' stuff. What my friends usually call me is Johnny."

"I am honor—Jawnny. I— My first name is Pierre."

"Okay, Pierre. Now listen; there are still a lot of things I want to know about certain people, and you boys are the ones to find out for me. Listen—"

He talked at some length, outlining the next day's work, charting the investigation. This was what Morrissy excelled in. An excellent manhunter, and untiring, he was best at administration. Give him the right assistants, they used to say, and he'd clear up anything.

"So you see?" he finished.

"I see, Monsieur — I mean, Jawnny. And it will all be done."

"Swell."

Morrissy, who had been bending far over, tapping out his points on Senac's knees, stood up. And as he stood up, the top of his empty mug went "chick." A piece of glass flew from it. On the far wall a tiny hole appeared, and there was a fine white drizzle of plaster.

Morrissy pushed the lieutenant so hard that Senac fell backward. Morrissy himself dropped to the floor. There was an instant of silence. Then Senac rose, his face blackening with rage. Even after he had recently seen how Morrissy could fight, he would have tackled the American, almost twice his weight, right then and there.

"*Non, non, non, non!* Other men you may punch like that, Monsieur, but not Pierre Senac!"

He started toward Morrissy, who cried: "Get down, you fool! Somebody's shooting at us!"

"But—but there was no sound!"

"Somebody's using a silencer. Must be out near that garden gate."

The rage Senac had shown before was mild compared with this. A man had fired at his friend Jawnny while he talked with an officer of the Garde. It was doubly an insult. An insult to Pierre Senac personally and to the organization which he represented.

"I'll kill him!"

He drew his revolver, and before Morrissy could stop him he had run out the French window and vaulted the balcony rail to the soft garden earth beneath. Morrissy ran out on the balcony, yelling a warning; but by that time Senac was at the gate.

Morrissy muttered, "A good kid, that kid."

Morrissy never really had believed that there would be a second shot. He simply had been opposed to taking unnecessary chances. Now he went back into his room, studied the hole in the plaster, dug at it with a penknife, prised out a small chunk of lead.

"Twenty-two. And from the marks of those lands and grooves, it was probably a pistol. Uh-uh! Bad guys they have around here."

When Senac returned, fifteen minutes later, panting heavily, still flushed with anger, he found John F. X. Morrissy making measurements. Morrissy was calm, exact.

"I found nobody, Jawnny!"

"I didn't think you would. Whoever it was, took the one shot and ran like hell. The thing chipped the top of my stein just as I was standing up. That must have been right about where my head had just been. Our friend, whoever he is, isn't a bad marksman."

"I cannot see how he could get away carrying a rifle!"

"He didn't have a rifle. He had a pistol. A man standing at that gate with a rifle might be conspicuous, even at this hour. But he could pause there, on the sidewalk next to the gate, and put a pistol over his left forearm, and take the shot—and then to anybody who happened to be around it would only look as though he had stopped to blow his nose or something."

"But you cannot put a silencer on a pistol!"

"Oh yes, you can. Not on an ordinary revolver or automatic—that's impossible. A silencer would blow a gun like that to pieces. Or at the very least it would burn off the hand of the man who held it. But a single-shot target pistol," Morrissy went on, "is different. There's no chamber to turn, giving the hot gases a chance to escape backward. There's no ejector apparatus, like on an automatic. I would say, from the looks of the slug, that this one was a Harrington and Richards. That ought to make it fairly easy to find. There can't be many pistols like that in a town

this size, and I suppose you boys keep pretty careful track of firearms?"

"Ah, *oui!* But of course we cannot know of them all."

"Naturally. But sportsmen who go in for target pistols usually are fussy about their ammunition. And maybe if you haven't got a record of the pistol itself, you might have one of somebody who is buying cartridges for such a gun. Right?"

"*C'est bon,* Monsieur! I mean—Jawnny! We will trace everything, and it may be that this scoundrel who wishes to kill you will have delivered himself into our hands when he took that shot!"

"Maybe. It's worth trying anyway. You go to work on that, Pierre. I'll get in touch with you first thing in the morning."

"Meanwhile, Jawnny, you will be careful?"

"Sure. I'm always careful. Take it easy on the way home now."

They shook hands.

Afterward Morrissy made sure that his door was locked, with a chair in front of it. He slid his revolver under the pillow. He closed and locked the storm windows. And then he went to sleep.

AT SEVEN o'clock, fortified by hastily gulped breakfast coffee, he started to work. Vacation? Hell, it was practically like being in New York! The same sort of labor—the same unexciting business of checking this, checking that, checking everything else. There were so many details; and a good cop shouldn't take anything for granted. Some people, Morrissy knew, thought that murder investigation was thrilling. They were nuts. There was no more thrill to it than to digging ditches.

There were only two things which made this day's work notably different from the work of investigating a murder in, say, Harlem. One was that when he snapped a question at somebody he was likely to get for answer "Pardon, Monsieur?" to remind him that he was, after all, in a foreign country. The other was that somebody was trying to kill him.

With Senac he was in constant communication. Senac was working as hard as Morrissy himself. Harder, perhaps. Morrissy had managed to get at least a few hours of sleep, but Senac had had none at all. They met at dinner, in the Berliner Hof. They were dead tired, drenched with sweat. They grinned a little, knowingly; but for some time they didn't say a word to one another. It was twenty-four hours, almost to the minute, from the time John F. X. Morrissy had landed in Haiti; and he had done a week's work. Now he drank beer, gratefully, in great impolite gulps. Senac sipped a cocktail. He was still sipping it, daintily as a woman, when Morrissy ordered his third mug of beer.

Across the Place L'Ouverture a setting sun, not visible from the Berliner Hof, hurled smashes of red light against the astounding whiteness of the President's Palace.

After a while Morrissy said, "Well, it's been quite a day."

"Ah," said Senac, and smiled a little.

"Now tell me what you know," said Morrissy. "All the stuff you couldn't tell me over the telephone."

"Ah, *oui.*" The Lieutenant reached into a pocket. He drew out a ball of absorbent cotton with a small chunk of mashed lead in the middle of it.

"The ballistics man says you were right. This was fired from a .22 caliber Sportsman's Special, a single-shot target pistol put out by the Harrington and Richards people."

"Uh-huh. Very interesting." Morrissy picked up the slug, took another from his pocket, held them close. "Exactly the same."

Senac's lethargy vanished. He leaned forward.

"Jawnny! You have been— That man has been—"

"All right. All right, Kid. He didn't hit me. That's the principal thing. He didn't hit me. Two misses for him. Next time *I'll* do the shooting."

Senac started to talk in Creole. He was too excited to use English. Morrissy shrugged, put both chunks of lead into the cotton, handed it back.

"Cut it out, Pierre," he said wearily. "You know I can't understand that stuff."

"We will go now and arrest him! We will go without delay!"

"No, we won't."

"*Mais oui!* He will shoot at you again! He will kill you, Jawnny! We will go there *immediatement!*"

"Now listen, Pierre. Are you running this case or am I?"

"But Jawnny—"

"Keep your shirt on. We will *not* go there right away! After we've had some grub you check out of here. I stay for a while. Then, when I'm ready, *I* check out. You watch me."

"But—"

"The reason being—in case I haven't made myself clear—that I think I'm being tailed."

"*Comment?*"

"I mean, I think somebody's following me. Clear? I go out, this baby goes after me, you go after him. That way, kid, we'll really find out things."

It was difficult for Pierre Senac. His Jawnny was in danger, and that was all he cared about. It was difficult for him to take orders. But John F. X. Morrissy had a way of getting what he wanted. And after dinner, Senac left.

John F. X. Morrissy sat there for some time, smoking cigarettes, thinking about things. Up in the Champs de Mars there was somebody watching him; and Morrissy, though he never appeared to look in that direction, was thoroughly aware of this fact. He seemed only disgusted, tired. He yawned and lighted another cigarette.

It was dark when he rose, yawning again, and paid the bill, and sauntered away. *Lalignes* hailed him, but he shook his head. He would walk.

JEFFREY FARJEON himself came to the door. He wore sloppy seersucker trousers, a sloppy white shirt, no coat. He wore also that expression of apologetic worriment Morrissy had seen on his face the previous evening when they'd met on the steps of the Edgar mansion.

"No servants? Don't tell me today's a holiday, too?"

Farjeon smiled.

"I always let them off after dinner," he explained, "unless I'm expecting guests. Come in, Captain. You see, I know now who you are. It's a pretty small white colony here, and things get around."

"Yeah," said Morrissy.

He followed the little man into a very large, very dim living room. On a table in the center of the room were several stamp albums, one of them open. There were some loose stamps too.

"I'm still at it, you see."

"Yeah," said Morrissy.

"Sit down, Captain, and tell me if you are getting anywhere in this murder business. Nasty, isn't it?"

"Yeah," said Morrissy.

"May I get you a drink, Captain?"

"Why not," said Morrissy.

When Farjeon returned from the kitchen, Morrissy was standing at the table, gazing curiously at the stamps.

"You know," Morrissy said, "it's funny about stamps."

"It is," Farjeon admitted. "I wonder at it myself, sometimes. After all they're nothing but little colored pieces of paper. And yet men who are otherwise sane, like me, will go mad on that one subject."

"Yeah," said Morrissy.

He paid no attention to the drink which Farjeon placed on the table within his reach. He continued to stare at the stamps.

"When they have inverted centers," he

said after a while, "they're supposed to be worth a lot more, aren't they?"

"Rather!"

"And yet all it means is that some dumb cluck made a slip and put the colors on upside down, isn't that right?"

"Yes. But it means everything in the world to a collector."

"It must have given you a big thrill, for instance, when you went into the post office here a week or so ago and bought a fifty-centime avion, and found it had an inverted center?"

"Say! Why, I'd put the thing on my letter before I—" Farjeon stopped. He stared at Morrissy. "Say, how did you happen to know about that, if I may ask?"

"It's a pretty small white colony here, and things get around."

Farjeon smiled.

"Well, then you know about the bitterest disappointment I've ever experienced. But of course, not being a collector yourself, you really won't be able to understand it."

"I could try."

"That was one of the greatest moments of my life—when I looked at that stamp I'd just put on a letter, and saw that it was an inverted center avion. I swear I almost died from excitement! The first thing I did was ask the post office clerk for the rest of the sheet. That particular stamp comes in sheets of one hundred, and I had bought only the second one—the one I'd put on my letter. So naturally I bought the other ninety-eight immediately."

"Naturally."

"I even inquired about the first one sold, thinking I might try to get that too, so that I'd have every stamp of that kind in the world. The clerk remembered who it was he'd sold it to."

"Yeah," said Morrissy, "it was Mrs. Ellsworth A. Edgar. Now go on to where you had your coat burned in a gasoline fire that afternoon and lost every single one of those ninety-nine stamps."

"Captain, I can't understand how—"

"It's my business to find out things, Mr. Farjeon, just the same as it's your business to collect those little hunks of paper."

"I don't remember telling anybody about that fire. However, if it comes to talking about stamps, I'll do that till the cows come home. Yes, it's true about the fire. I discharged my house boy because of it, but that didn't make me feel any better. I had lost ninety-nine rare stamps, the only ones of their kind—except one."

"So to get that one became the whole aim of your life."

"It certainly did! I was ready to offer any price for it. I was ready to do anything to get it!"

"So you went to Mrs. Edgar and offered to buy it. Why wouldn't she sell? Did she explain?"

"Well, Mrs. Edgar acted very strangely about that stamp. At first she said she couldn't remember what she'd done with it, and then she said she'd lost it. But she was lying."

"Yeah. So you decided that she still had it, and for reasons beyond your comprehension she was hanging on to it. And you decided, after she'd turned you down repeatedly, that the only way to get it was to steal it. Not having any experience in burglary, you made up your mind to hire a professional. The real mystery to me was how you ever happened to contact Skitty Cather."

"Captain, are you drunk?"

"Nope." Morrissy was still standing there looking down at the stamps. He

spoke casually, as though what he said didn't matter much. "Well, we'll skip that part of it. Anyway, you had a conference with Skitty in the back room of the Army Bar, and you asked him to steal the stamp for you. He needed the money you offered. But when he went out of the place he walked right into the Garde. Some tourist, it seems, had recognized him from his pictures in the American papers. You heard the fuss, and you very wisely ducked out by the back door."

MORRISSY looked up for the first time.

"And don't tell me you didn't, because we have three witnesses who will testify to having seen you in there."

It was a lie, but it worked. Farjeon cried fiercely:

"All right! I *was* in there. I *was* talking to that man. But I didn't know who he was. And all this talk about me hiring him to steal that stamp is absolutely crazy!"

Morrissy went on, slowly, with no expression:

"Skitty knew it meant the chair, once we got him back. So he broke jail. And then where should he go? Why, right to the home of Ellsworth A. Edgar! You had described the place, given him the layout. He knew how much you wanted that stamp. He was going to get it for you, and then he was going to make you pay—besides the money, he was going to make you get him a new outfit of clothes and to harbor him until the chase cooled. He could make you do that if he had the stamp. He could make you do anything. It was a pretty wild hope, but it was the only one Skitty had. So he went to the Edgar house and broke in.

"Of course, Skitty broke in nicely—not the way you did. Skitty knew his job, while you were a bungling amateur. You had figured that Skitty never would be able to work for you, so you'd finally decided to take a shot at that burglary job yourself. Boy-oh-boy! When you chumps go nutty about stamps, you *do* go nutty, don't you?"

"Captain," Farjeon said earnestly, "please stop talking gibberish and get out of this house."

"Skitty was in the place when you got there, and he'd been fanning the lady's bedroom. Of course he didn't find the thing. She didn't have it. But he overheard some conversation in the living room which told him where the stamp *was*. Meanwhile, you had busted in clumsily.

"Ellsworth Edgar heard you, came after you. And you lost your head and went bang-o with a number 8 niblick.

"Well, Skitty came on the run, saw what had happened, and got you out the only way he could in view of the noise. He got you out by way of the window you'd come in by. And he tore his pants in the process, which was something he never would have done if he'd been alone.

"Then, of course, Skitty had you. You *had* to take care of him, because if he was arrested he'd tell who killed Edgar."

"Captain," Farjeon said slowly, "you're a very smart man."

"Going back to the house immediately after the murder was a dumb play," Morrissy said. "Don't you suppose we could figure that one? You wanted to find out how much we knew, and you also wanted to cover yourself in case anybody had seen you in that neighborhood. What was even more important, you wanted to protect yourself in case your fingerprints were found on that niblick."

"I repeat, Captain, you're a very smart man. But not quite smart enough. Don't you realize that I've taken a pistol out of this table drawer, and that I've got it pointed at you?"

MORRISSY glanced contemptuously at him.

"Sure I realize it. I also realize that there aren't any cartridges in it. I took

them out while you were mixing the drink."

"Oh."

"Speaking of guns, one reason I came here tonight was to tell you to stop shooting at me. I suppose Skitty made you do that? Skitty's scared of me, always has been. I suppose he figured he never would be able to escape from this place, even with your help, as long as I was on the job. So he told you to bump me off or else—— Is that the way it was?"

"There's no reason to tell you anything, Captain. You know everything already."

"Oh, I wouldn't say that. There are still a few things I want to learn. For instance, what have you done with Fred Chartey?"

"Don't you think we've had enough of this?" asked Everett Bond, walking into the room with a huge Colt automatic in his fist.

"Hello, punk," said Morrissy. "So you've switched jobs, huh? Can't you ever play straight with anybody at all? Mrs. Edgar was a fool to send for you in the first place and she was twice as much of a fool to tell you about Farjeon here trying to buy that stamp."

"That's right," said Bond. "I figured I might as well collect at both ends. All she ever wanted was the letter. She didn't give a damn about the stamp on it. I could have that."

"It must be a pretty hot letter?"

"It was. It's burned now. I give my customers satisfaction."

"Did you get more for it than Chartey was trying to hold her up for?"

"That's my business. What I want to know is, why were you so dumb as to come to this house alone?"

"What makes you think I did come alone?"

"Because I've just fanned the grounds and there isn't anybody in sight," said the master crook, Skitty Cather.

He entered from the kitchen. He carried a revolver in each hand. He didn't point them at Morrissy, simply held them at his sides. He was a mean-faced fellow, wizened, monkey-like. He stood spread-legged.

"Howdy, Captain."

"Hello, you dirty little louse. How are you?"

"In answer to yours of recent date in re Chartey," the crook replied, "would state that he's upstairs right now, all taped and gagged. We'll let him go later, maybe. After we've polished you off, Captain. You know, I've wanted to bump you or see you bumped for years. This is going to be the happiest day in my life."

Farjeon cried, "Now see here! No more murder!"

Skitty said, "No? I suppose you want to let this dick walk out of here, so that you can get yourself pinched for tapping old man Edgar's skull last night? I suppose you like the prospect of spending the rest of your life in a nice cockroachy Haitian jail? Well, it's different with me. They got the death penalty up in New York. Get that silencer out again."

He grinned at Morrissy.

John F. X. Morrissy, in that hot room, felt a trifle cold. He had not expected Bond. Bond, he knew, had been waiting for Chartey the previous night in Chartey's room—waiting with a gun, prepared to hold up the blackmailer and take back the letter. That was when Morrissy himself had walked in on him, spoiling the plan.

What they had done was have Farjeon, a personal friend, telephone to Chartey and ask him over. They had figured, correctly, that Chartey would have the letter on his person, not daring to leave it anywhere in his hotel room which might be searched. And when he came, they had jumped him—Farjeon and Skitty.

BUT Bond's arrival disconcerted Morrissy. He had known that Bond was trailing him, but he had supposed that Senac understood he was to arrest the man

as he started to enter the Farjeon house.

Where the devil *was* Senac? Skitty Cather, who had the eyes of a cat, had said there was nobody outside. So John F. X. Morrissy felt a trifle cold. But he smiled. He was a large, distinguished-looking man, and he had a charming smile. His white bank-president's mustache lifted, and he showed hard white teeth.

"So you're going to do it yourself, Skitty?"

"Darn tootin' I am. Farjeon, get out that little gat and the silencer. We've had too much talking around this dump already. Now we're going to catch a little action."

He moved until the table separated him from John F. X. Morrissy. He placed his two revolvers on the table. He took the Harrington and Richards target pistol from Farjeon's trembling hands, and very carefully he screwed a long silencer into place. He shook the thing, to make sure that the silencer was firm.

Morrissy just stood there. There wasn't anything else he could do. It was horrible to be killed like this, without a chance to fight. But Bond had him covered with the Colt, and there wasn't a possibility that Morrissy could get to his own gun in time. A man clings to every second of life. So Morrissy just stood there.

"So here it comes," said Skitty Cather.

There was a window which showed out to the vine-screened veranda, behind Morrissy. It was a large window, and when it was smashed it made a loud noice. But that noise was swallowed instantly in the banging of a revolver.

Skitty Cather probably never knew what happened. He went right over backward, his breastbone broken, two chunks of lead in his heart and a third somewhere in the muscles of his back.

Everett Bond opened his mouth. He probably yelled something, but nobody heard it. He fired twice, the big Colt kicking viciously. Then he dropped the Colt, and turned around, and fell on his face. He didn't crumple. He fell full-length, like a tree.

Jeffrey Farjeon went for the two revolvers on the table. Of the four men in the room he was the slowest. John F. X. Morrissy, moving only his right arm, had shot him before he even got a hand on the butt of one of those revolers.

The silence was very sudden, and somehow wrong. The room smelled abominably of gunpower. It was close, seemed airless. The echoes of the shots were beaten before they started.

Morrissy, lowering his gun, said, "Okey-doke, Pierre."

"Comment?"

"I said let it go. That's enough cannonading. The situation is well in hand. And incidentally, what kept you so long?"

"You are not hurt, Jawnny?"

"My feelings are hurt, that's all. Didn't I tell you to pick up that louse Bond before he had a chance to come in here?"

"Ah, *non! Non, non, non, non, non!*"

"You mean I *didn't* tell you that?"

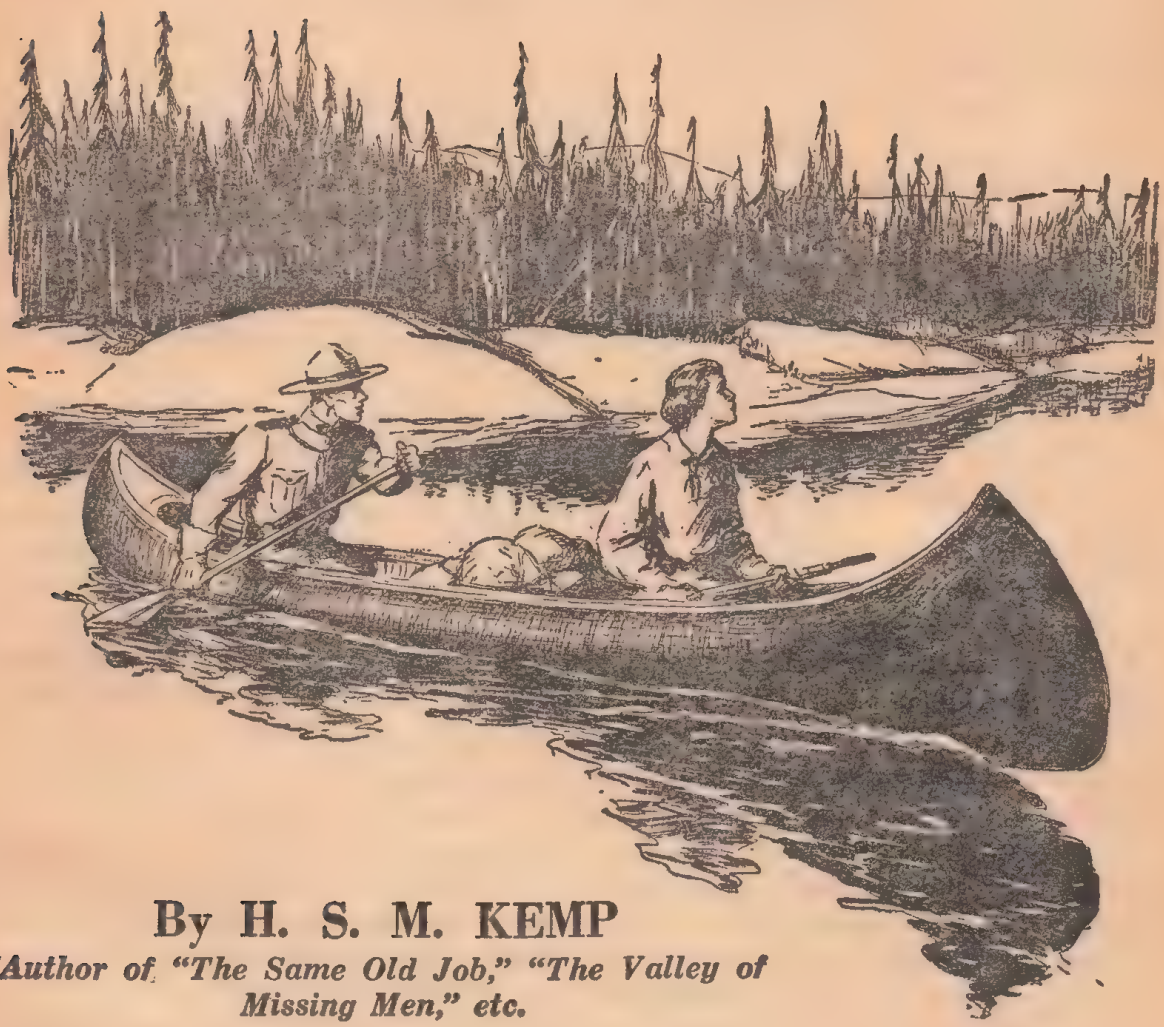
"Absolutement non, Jawnny. So I didn't not know what to do. And while I was out there thinking, out comes the man Cather, moving oh-so-carefully! and looking around. So I climbed a tree."

"You climbed a—"

"I had heard, Jawnny, that men who seek something seldom look above the level of their eyes. So I climbed a small mango tree. And the Cather man walked right underneath me without looking up. Then he went back into the house. I climbed down, and took a look through a window. I started right away to shoot."

"Hell," muttered Morrissy. "I certainly meant to tell you to pick up Bond. Must be getting old, Pierre. I forgot things." He sighed. "Well, let's snatch a telephone and set Chartey free and start getting this mess cleaned up. I don't know about you, kid, but *I* want a couple of beers before I go to bed."

GUARDIAN ANGEL



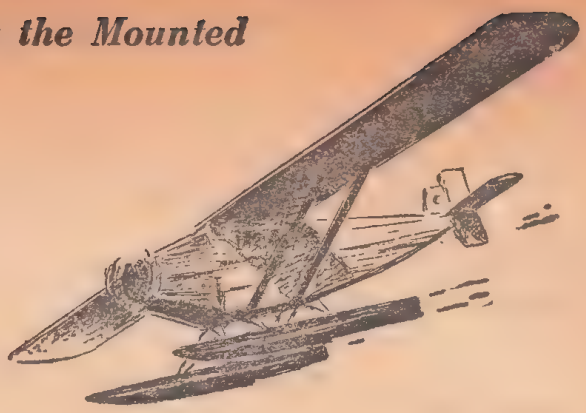
By H. S. M. KEMP

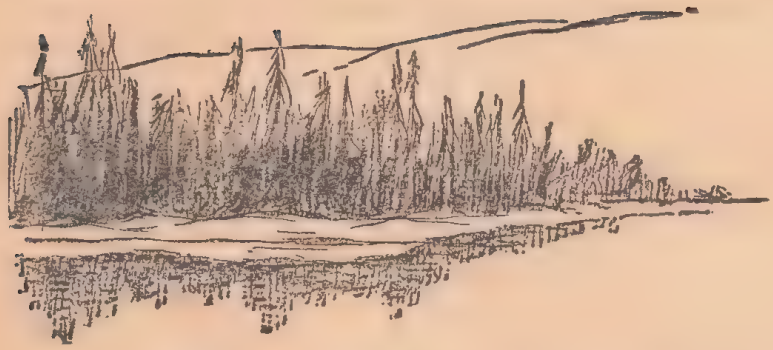
Author of "The Same Old Job," "The Valley of Missing Men," etc.

CHAPTER I

SHADOWED

AIDED by the six-mile-an-hour current and her own powerful engines, the Hudson Bay Company's *Missigamow* drove steadily into the North. Behind her, a hundred and fifty miles distant, lay Civilization and The Landing; before her, a wilderness empire. Those on board, the fifty-odd who made up her passenger-list, were of the North also. There were trappers, going back from a spell Outside; traders, bucking the Company but travelling on the Company's boat. There were half a dozen Mounted Policemen, to be dropped off at the various down-river detachments; a handful of prospectors; two Church of England missionaries and the last a Roman Catholic priest.





There were also, Jim Dawson and the girl.

She caught Jim's eye as he stepped on board. Taller than the average; slim and straight as a young spruce. Jim liked the courageous set of her chin, the directness of her brown eyes; the distinction she gave to the mannish garb of riding-breeches, high boots and plain drill shirt. But that was one of the few glimpses he had of her—until she broke into his cabin so unheralded late at night.

Jim was rolling himself a cigarette preparatory to turning in. The door of the stateroom slammed open, slammed shut again; and the girl was standing there. Her hands clasped the door while her breast heaved and the firm chin trembled.

Jim raised an eyebrow; turned. "Howdy!" he grinned. "Or is this a raid?"

Jim's grin was his greatest asset. It was frank, disarming. It went well with his coppery skin and humorous mouth. Too, it softened the aggressiveness of his nose and the rather hard line of his jaw. Under its influence, the girl lost some of her panic.

"I'm sorry," she said, breathlessly. "I didn't know— There wasn't any time, you see," she lamely concluded.

"Ah!" Jim nodded. "And when there isn't time, a feller just has to take a chance!" He looked up at the stateroom windows, and noted with satisfaction that he had already drawn the heavy curtains. "But now you're here," he suggested, "is there some little thing I can do?"

The girl hesitated. "Those men—well, they were coming around the deck." She stopped, seemingly at a loss.

Jim's eyebrows lifted and he became suddenly businesslike. "Men, eh?" He hopped to the door, pushed the girl gently to one side and stepped out.

The night was clear, star-studded. He glanced up the deck, down, and thought he saw a figure vanish around the wheel-house. But it might only have been imagination; and when the figure failed to appear, he re-entered his stateroom and locked the door.

The girl was standing as he had left her beside the tiny table. He kicked forward the only chair the place boasted and sug-

gested they might as well be comfortable. For his part, he resumed his seat on the edge of the bunk and continued the tailoring of the cigarette.

"Confession," he pointed out, "is good for the soul. Would I do as your padre?"

The girl smiled, remaining standing. "You must think me an idiot to come barging in like this."

"I once barged into a hole beneath a spruce to dodge a cyclone," Jim pointed out. "There was a bear with cubs in it; but I didn't know it till I landed. I guess I looked an idiot, too."

"And what happened?"

"Plenty! But I'm still alive." He paused to light his smoke. "On with your confession!" he prompted.

"There isn't much," objected the girl; "and perhaps I'm being foolish. Still, I'm sure those men are shadowing me. I know it, in fact! I've felt them around my stateroom all day. And tonight, when I came out for a breath of air, one of them tried to speak to me.

"The brute!" Jim grinned. "And you don't like speaking to strange men?"

UNDER his banter, a smile came to the girl's lips.

"But this is all terribly serious. For me, as well as for someone else. And I'm afraid that when I get off at Fort McAllister—" She paused abruptly. "I'm afraid; horribly afraid!"

Jim drew on his cigarette. "So you're getting off at McAllister?" he observed. "Do you have to?"

"It's imperative. And if I'm alone with them then—"

"I wouldn't worry too much. And if you have to get off, perhaps things can be arranged."

"But they'll be watching for me!" protested the girl. "There are three of them, I think. They'll be right at the gangplank, in the dark."

Jim did not seem to hear. He was sitting on the edge of the bunk, swinging his feet in their heavy prospector's boots and staring at the floor. After a little he consulted his strap-watch.

"We're due there in twenty minutes. Looks like we've got to move." Then—"Swim?" he suddenly asked her.

She shook her head. "Very little. Certainly not enough to take a chance on a current like this."

"No swim, eh?" He stood up, pulled on a well-used hat and slipped into a sweater. "Stay in here and keep the door locked. The purser's cabin is next-but-one, so nobody'll start a rumpus. I'll take a look-see; and you can let me in when I knock."

This time Jim found the cabin-deck deserted. He walked the length of it forward, and went down to the bow-deck. Around the capstan a group of men sat singing to the accompaniment of an accordion. Elsewhere were two or three more. But none, however, seemed interested in his movements. He turned aft, passed the engine-room and came at last to the stern.

Close-hauled behind the *Missigamow* was a barge. On its roof lay three canoes, one of them Jim's own eighteen-foot cruiser. Jim gave the canoes speculatory appraisal, turned, and went up to his cabin. The girl admitted him.

"Coast all clear and peaceful as a graveyard," was his report. "We've about ten minutes left, and it's time you were on your way."

"On my way?" The girl frowned. "I don't understand."

"You will. The first thing, though, is your baggage. Is it all packed?"

"Just about. A moment is all I need."

Jim snapped out the light, opened the door for another survey, then allowed the girl to slip by him.

"My stateroom is on the other side of the deck," she pointed out. "Will you come with me?"

"Lead on!" was Jim's grim answer.

They made to the port side, and while the girl packed, Jim leaned over the deck-

rail smoking a cigarette. Save for the stars, the night was an inky cloak. There was the soft swish and gurgle of the water, the dull throbbing of the engines; the spice-like smell of balsam, muskeg and pine. All, as Jim had said, very peaceful; but against the indigo of the sky he saw a man come tiptoeing towards him.

Tiptoeing was the word—a pace or two, a pause while the head turned. Jim cupped his cigarette in his hand and gave the mysterious prowler another thirty seconds to run into certain trouble. But before the time limit was up the door of the girl's cabin opened again.

At the sound it made, the prowler wheeled and raced round the corner of the deck. Jim had to make a snap decision as to whether to follow the man or to stay with the girl. He decided to stay with the girl.

She closed her door. "Ready?"

Jim gave a grunt. "I'll take your bags. Then hit down the deck, snappy and fast."

They descended the stern-stairs and picked their path around a top-load of cook-stoves, dog-sleighs and a crated piano. Jim looked behind him, then drew the girl swiftly to one side.

"Duck!" he whispered. "One of your shadows—following us up!"

WITH the girl bulwarked between a couple of big cases, Bill took another cautious survey. The blurred figure was coming down the stairs — gingerly, one step at a time. Jim flattened himself in front of the girl; watched his man come closer.

The man was a dozen feet away; ten feet away—almost sliding along. Jim saw his head move as it peered from side to side; saw him stop, and come on again.

"He's looking for something; and he'll find it!" Jim predicted grimly. "Too bad if I've picked the wrong horse!"

Too bad, indeed. For Jim suddenly sprang from the shadows and zipped an uppercut clean to the prowler's jaw. There was a grunt and a crash; a little cry from the girl; then silence again.

"Nice going, Dawson!" Jim told himself. "And now to get onto the job."

He picked up the girl's luggage, led the way to the barge behind and gave her his hand while she leaped aboard.

"Now here's the idea," he told her. "Here's my canoe, and I'll shove it into the water over the stern. All you have to do is to get in and ride the swell. Can you handle a paddle? Good, and so much the better! Just hit for shore, then, and keep your eyes open for the first wharf. It's the wharf in front of old Limpy Acres' shack. Limpy's a friend of mine; so just crash the shack and introduce yourself. I'll be along later."

"But suppose this Limpy Acres isn't home?" protested the girl.

"So much the better. It'll save you meeting Limpy. But if he isn't there, he'll be around. I heard from him last month; and his place is never locked."

Just at that moment the steamer's siren bellowed hoarsely. Down the river and a short half-mile distant lights were showing.

"O.K.," said Jim. "Do your stuff!"

He slid the canoe into the water and held it while he loaded the girl's bags. Then he assisted her to a place amidships.

"There's the paddle, see? Grab it. And are you all ready?" He swung the bow of the canoe into line. "Don't get scared!" he cautioned her. "Just sit tight and ride the swell."

"I'm not scared," the girl assured him. "You'll come down to the shack?"

Jim gave a grin. "Try and keep me away!"

He gave a push; then knelt there watching the bouncing canoe until it was swallowed up in the darkness.

Chapter II

CACHE OF GOLD

RETURNING, Jim found no sign of the man he had walloped. Either the prowler's jaw was as tough as it felt, or he had recovered and made his getaway. Jim climbed the stairs, reached his stateroom, and decided that he, too, was getting off at McAllister. He went on to the purser's quarters and advised him of the fact, then returned to his own to pack his outfit.

The outfit was nothing of great importance. There was a well-worn kit of prospector's tools, a .30 Special Winchester, a tump-line and a packsack. When the *Missigamow* cramped into the dock in front of the Hudson's Bay post he was ready.

He was not the only passenger to get off. He found himself caught between one of the missionaries and a Mounted Policeman. A dozen other men were behind and around him — prospectors, a couple of trappers, three Government geologists heading for the reputed oil-strike a mile or so from the Post. They came down the gangplank together and waited while their outfits were put ashore.

But Jim did not wait. Dumping his stuff on the wharf, he pushed through a crowd of nighthawk Indians and found himself alone on the grassy slope. Lights twinkled on the *Missigamow* and orders were being bellowed in English and Cree.

Now, if the girl's theory were correct, it behooved him to move with circumspection. He wanted to get to Limpy Acres' shack as quickly as possible, but he had no desire to head a parade. For that reason he chose a roundabout route—up to the Company's buildings, behind them; down a spruce-clad trail. Five minutes later he reached Limpy's cabin, and found the place in darkness.

For a moment he was apprehensive, but a tap on the locked door brought him the sound of the girl's voice.

"Who is there?"

Jim grinned. "Your Guardian Angel!" And the door was opened.

He locked the door again. "Limpy not home, eh? He's got a fox-farm down the river a piece. Probably spending the night there." But before he hunted a light, Jim covered the window with a blanket from Limpy's bed. He had matches in his pocket, and there was a kerosene lamp on the table. With the lamp lighted, he turned to the girl.

"Well; any trouble?"

She shook her head; smiled. "None at all. And you?"

"Not a thing."

His strap-watch showed the time to be a few minutes after midnight.

"How about a cup of coffee?" he suggested. "Limpy should have some around." He brewed the coffee, raided Limpy's larder and produced the elements of a meal. There was canned milk, some greasy butter, a cold roast of moosemeat and a hunk of discouraging bannock. "Limpy never was a cook," Jim apologized. "But if it didn't kill him, it needn't kill us."

The girl accepted a cup of coffee but cast a doubtful glance at the food.

"I don't think I'm hungry," she decided at last. "No; the coffee will do me fine."

Jim gave a grin. "Come morning, I'll get some decent grub from the Company's. But just now, we'll introduce ourselves. A little late and all that, but I'm Jim Dawson."

"And I'm Laurel Dell."

"Laurel Dell." Jim repeated the name. "You wouldn't be fooling me, would you?"

"Why, what do you mean?"

"Laurel Dell. That sounds like the name of a house in the country—blue skies, and flowers, a laurel hedge and dicky-birds singing in the trees. Laurel Dell. Gosh, that's pretty! And they call you Larry for short!"

A flash of something like fear showed in the girl's eyes. "How do you know they call me Larry?" she challenged him.

"Know it? Gosh, I don't know it! I only figured they would."

Her eyes seemed to burn through him. They were straight, questioning. But Jim forgot their severity. They were just the loveliest eyes he had ever looked into.

"Don't go off the deep end!" he begged her. "And if 'Larry' upsets you, I'll call you 'Sarah Jane'!"

She smiled; and it was as though the sun had come out from behind a cloud.

"I'm silly," she confessed. "I guess it's my nerves."

"Nerves!" hooted Jim. "At your age! You shouldn't be worried with nerves."

THE girl picked up her coffee and took it to a chair that was blanket-covered and made from a biscuit-barrel.

"Perhaps I shouldn't," she said. "But I'm going to tell you just what I'm up against. I know that you want to know—"

Jim made a gesture. "Don't tell me anything if you'd rather not."

She laughed nervously. "I *want* to tell you. And I'm afraid I'd have to, anyway." Then—"I'm Fred Dell's daughter," she said.

Jim looked at her for a moment and a slow grin spread over his face.

"Guess you'll have to come again. Who is Fred Dell?"

"You don't know? Fred Dell—the man they're holding in Rockburg on a murder charge."

"Dell? Fred Dell?" Jim repeated the name. "Why, sure! He's the chap that beefed some other gink in a row over a gold claim!"

"He didn't beef—I mean he didn't kill anybody! It was a put-up job. Tom Blair was murdered, certainly; but it wasn't dad who did the killing!"

"Now, now!" chided Jim Dawson. "Don't blow a gasket! I'm only repeating what I saw in the papers." He gave her a smile. "You're dynamite, all right—Miss Laurel Dell!"

Jim's banter again won out. The girl put her cup on the table and leaned back in the chair.

"Look, Mr. Dawson; I'll tell you everything that happened—"

"Mister Dawson isn't around," Jim observed. "Last I heard of the old gentleman he was out at the Coast for his health. Will *Jim* Dawson do in a pinch?"

"Well, Jim—dad, who has been a prospector all his life, went north with old Tom Blair to investigate a yarn they had heard regarding gold near the Kakwa Hills. They were lucky; so lucky that not only did they find their gold, but this spring they washed out ninety pounds and started south with it."

"Ninety pounds!" broke in Jim. "Why, that's—"

"Nearly forty thousand dollars' worth. Yes. They were lucky. But their luck deserted them as soon as they started for home. They swamped in a rapid on the Green Snake River, lost everything, and were lucky to get off with their lives."

"Holy Murphy! Forty thousand dollars in the bottom of a rapid!"

"I haven't finished," interposed the girl. "Dad tells me that where the spill occurred, a big rock stuck up in midstream. Tom Blair had a belt-axe, and with it they managed to drop a big spruce-tree above this rock. The rest was easy. They went out on the tree, crawled down the branches and were able to retrieve the bags that held the gold. But they lost everything else."

Jim smiled. "I'd lose a sizable outfit without a whimper if it meant locating forty thousand dollars. And then they had to walk home!"

"And quite a walk it might have been. The accident happened a hundred miles north of Raining Lake; and Raining Lake is seventy miles north of here."

"All of that. I was through there once."

"Dad says they hit cross-country, liv-

ing off berries and anything they could find. But the weight of the gold grew too much for them. At last they decided to bury it, and return whenever they could. Fortunately, each had a compass; and as they travelled — following rivers and creeks—they made a map of their travels. Just two weeks later they ran into a bunch of moose-hunting Indians, and found themselves on Raining Lake."

THE girl's face suddenly hardened. "And now for the rest of it—Old Tom was a good man in the bush, but a liquor-hound in town. They had to get an outfit together or raise the cost of an aeroplane-trip into this cache of theirs. But Tom, instead of getting down to business, began to celebrate. One night he was drunk in the Hotel Northern. He had several nuggets with him, and also the map. Dad tells me he flourished the map and bragged about all the wealth he and dad would bring home. Dad managed to get him out of the place; and in an alley-way they were set on by three men. There was a fight, of course; and somebody had a revolver. Dad said he laid one man out, then the bullets began to fly. Bullets brought the police—who took Dad to jail and Tom to the undertaker's."

Jim did not interrupt. It was Laurel Dell's story, and she would have to tell it in her own way. Suddenly—

"The police! Oh, the fools they are!" she cried, bitterly. "They wouldn't listen to dad's version. The three men who had set on them disappeared when the police got there, and the revolver with them. At the inquest, the coroner tried to say that dad threw the gun away, and that somebody else picked it up. But it's absurd; it's wicked! Dad never owned a revolver in his life!"

Jim waited till the girl's outburst had subsided. In the interval he poured her another cup of coffee and took one himself.

"There was no shortage of evidence," she went on at last. "Three or four hired perjurers swore that dad and Tom had quarrelled in the hotel and that dad had had the gun on him then. So there you are! A framed-up charge, crooked evidence, and dad awaiting trial in the fall."

"Humm. And in the meantime you're going after this cache of his."

"Which is another angle to the case. These men who killed Tom Blair succeeded in robbing him of the map. I found that out through a man who came to me one night and sold me the information for fifty dollars. He was a foul-looking individual; repulsive. A dope-fiend by the name of Shimmy Johnson. He said he would give the information and the name of the man behind the killing for fifty dollars and my promise not to mention the matter to the police."

"And you kept your promise?"

"Of course I did."

"There's no honor amongst a bunch of cut-throats and hop-heads," observed Jim.

"But there is amongst the Dells!" The girl's eyes were straight, frank. Then, abruptly, her manner changed. "Or is there, I wonder? You see—" and for a moment she hesitated—"Joe Grady stole the map from Tom, but I stole it again from him!"

JIM DAWSON sat up. "Eh? What's all this?"

She looked at him defiantly. "I say I stole it from him. And why not? He was a thief; a murderer—"

"Good gosh, girl; I'm not blaming you!" chided Jim. "But Joe Grady! Isn't he the Big Noise of Rockburg?"

"Yes. Deputy mayor, brilliant lawyer, and I don't know what else. It was Joe Grady who offered to finance dad and old Tom on their first trip to the Kakwa Hills."

"But how did you steal it from him?"

"Under the name of Mary Jackson, I rented an office across from his own and opened up as a public stenographer. I got

little business, but I kept an eye on Joe Grady. Of course, he would know that Fred Dell had a daughter, but he didn't know me at all. I had only been in Rockburg a few weeks. But anyway, one night a couple of toughs and a mining-man had a conference with Grady. By using a mirror over my transom and looking into his, I saw Grady talking to these three with a certain paper on his desk. The three went out soon afterwards; and, a little later, Grady followed. Oh, I was ready for him!" said the girl. "While he was locking his door, I slugged him with a heavy ruler and took his wallet. Luck was with me. The map was inside."

Jim whistled in sheer amazement. "You slugged him!"

"You bet I did! And I'd do it again if I had the chance," said the girl viciously. "The murdering rat! Then that same night I took the train for The Landing, booked passage on the *Missigamow*—and here we are!"

Jim, recovering from his amazement, gave the story a moment's thought.

"Yes; here we are. And where do we go from here?"

"North; to find that cache of gold. I can hire Indians and a canoe, I suppose. I've the map with me. And if I can get the money for that gold, dad'll have the best defense counsel it's possible to procure."

"A tall job for Miss Laurel Dell. Couldn't you have trusted some of your friends?"

"My nearest friends are all in the East. But anyway, after dad's experience, I trust no one."

"But—" and Jim grinned. "You're trusting me!"

"You proved yourself. Tonight."

Jim glowed at her frankness. "But you're still all wet," he told her bluntly. "This batting around the North and fighting a gang is no job for a woman. You needn't have spilled all you know, but if you'd gone to the police——"

"The police!" Her lip curled.

"Well; the Mounted Police. You've got your chance right here. One got off the boat with me."

"I'll go it alone!"

There was no use arguing with Miss Larry Dell. Jim could see that. In which case— "Can I give a hand then?" he asked her.

She looked up quickly. "No you've done enough already. You've been splendid!"

"I haven't done a thing."

"You have!"

"All right, Dynamite!" grinned Jim Dawson. "I'll just fade out of the picture and leave you here—"

But the return of sudden terror in her eyes checked him. "Well?" he asked.

"Forgive me," she said contritely. "I'm a thankless little beast. But I can't trade on good nature. I know prospectors and prospecting; and this is your busy time. But if you could help me get started—"

Jim stood up, tugging at his breeches and thumbing-in his shirt.

"Now look here, Miss Dynamite; it's all very well for you to bat around this country and get your pretty neck wrung; but I'd have it on my conscience—such as it is. Right now, you'll continue to decorate that chair while I slip down to the Post and rustle us an outfit of grub. They'll still be up, and you can lock the door while I'm gone. After that, we'll step into my little red canoe and leave for the Open North. Now, bawl me out again!"

She swallowed, and Jim saw the lump go up and down in her throat.

"I don't know what to say—"

"Then how'd it be," suggested Jim, "if you just said nothing at all?"

Chapter III

TROUBLE AHEAD

OUT in the night and taking a large view of things, Jim decided that Miss Laurel Dell was pretty much on the spot. This Joe Grady was apparently a bird who

knew his way around. A smooth duck. A fast worker. While Jim had never met the gentleman, Joseph Grady had all the earmarks of a combined stage-villain and gang-lord.

Witness the killing of old Tom Blair and the manner in which the blame had been shifted onto Fred Dell. Witness, too, the appearance of the three musketeers on the *Missigamow*. Of course, the girl had not been in actual danger on the boat; Jim knew that. Rough-stuff wouldn't go there. But these shadowers of hers couldn't be trusted once she left the haunts of men. In fact, Jim took on gooseflesh at the mere thought. All of which indicated that if Joseph Grady were a fast worker, James Dawson would need to be a faster one.

The Hudson's Bay Post was in darkness when he arrived, but a man, carrying a lantern, was locking the door of the store. Jim hailed him.

"Hey, Jock!"

The man lifted the lantern, allowing its beam to fall on Jim's face.

"Jock's away to town on a holiday with the wife. Went out on the boat last week. I'm the clerk."

"Tell you, old man; I hate to ask a feller to stay out of bed at two in the morning, but if you could fix me up with an outfit of grub, I'd call you a gentleman and a prince."

The lantern lowered. "You prospectors—! Always kihooting out at ungodly hours! Any particular rush?"

"Rush!" exclaimed Jim. "I'll bet you a ten-dollar gold-piece against a plug of niggerhead that there'll be the biggest stampede tomorrow you ever saw!"

"Something good?"

"You'd be surprised!"

The clerk unlocked the door and led the way within. Jim wrote out a list of the supplies he needed, and waited while they were packed into a couple of boxes. He paid the clerk, told him he was more than a prince, and toted his boxes down to the river. His outfit was still there, as well as his light outboard motor, fuel-cans and bedroll that had been unloaded from the *Missigamow*. As the light went out and reappeared in the Post dwelling, Jim struck off again for Limpy Acres' shack.

For the moment he was disposed to forget the three thugs who had trailed Laurel Dell to Fort McAllister. By what she had told him, these men were doubtless the three who had made medicine with Joe Grady in his office in Rockburg. One, the girl reported, looked like a mining-man; which meant that the other two were city crooks. They would be more or less out of place in the North, and, consequently, not apt to prowl around at night looking for someone who had completely vanished.

But his nerves suddenly tightened. From behind, towards the Indian teepee-village, came the bellowing howl of cross-bred huskies. He turned, and between himself and the Post saw two or three shadowy figures making his way. They might not be the particular three he had in mind, but he could not afford to gamble on it.

By keeping to the sparse timber, he made the shack on the hard run. The girl opened when he identified himself, and before he stepped in he looked behind him again. The eastern sky was streaking, and he thought he could see those shadowy forms. He told the girl his fears, picked up her bags and hurried her outside.

THEY reached the shore and worked their way to his canoe at waterline. Jim put girl and bags aboard and shoved out.

"Thank God for the fringe of willows!" he muttered. But he had more

than the willows to be thankful for. The dawn mist stretched over the water, acting as another screen to any movement five yards out. He paddled into the mist, then paused abruptly at a sound.

It was the sound of feet on boards. Booted feet on the boards of Limpy Acres' shack. In the dead air he heard voices, and caught a word or two.

"Not here—further on— The bush—"

There was more clumping of feet; then silence.

"Get it?" he whispered to Laurel Dell. "They figure we've got away on them. And maybe we have!"

Five minutes of downstream paddling brought them to the Company's wharf. The dawn was breaking, but here at water's edge the night still held. Jim allowed the canoe to slide onto the beach beyond the wharf, then he got out.

"I'll fetch my engine and the rest of the gear." And to hearten her—"They won't be back!"

With the outfit loaded, there remained but to fix the engine to the canoe. He was on the point of doing this when the padding of feet reached him. Came a low cry from the girl; and he swung, to meet the danger.

The three again. Storming over him like an avalanche. Carrying him backwards by weight of numbers. He went down, half in the water. Came up, smashing out at anything he saw. This was no common gang-fight; and he knew it. It was brutal, silent murder. A knife missed his stomach and ripped his thigh. He swung viciously with his booted foot and heard one man's groan of agony. But there were two men left.

He fell, and getting up grabbed the gunwale of the canoe. He shoved it out into the deep water.

"Beat it!" he yelled at the girl.

Somebody tried to pass him, and a fist flattened his ear against his head. He came up with his knee and caught the owner of the fist in the groin. Momentarily, but one man was left. Jim drove forward, using his head as a battering-ram. He missed, and fell. A boot caught him sickeningly in the ribs, but he caught the foot and yanked on it. The other man went down, and Jim stamped on his face. Then he was in the water, clutching at the canoe.

He managed to drag himself aboard without dumping the outfit.

"Gimme a paddle!" he ordered the girl.

With it he dug deeply and swung the nose of the canoe into the current. Still paddling he made three hundred yards and around the first bend; then on the opposite side of the river went ashore.

The girl spoke, breathlessly. "It was *awful!*"

"Yeah—awful rough. Sit tight till I grab that engine."

He got the engine into position, fuelled it, and out in the current again spun it into life.

As the banks of the river slipped past, he began to breathe easier. His flattened ear burned and pained, and his thigh was numb. He ran an exploratory hand downward, found a gash in his breeches. More than the gash, he felt something sticky and wet. He grunted. Not so good. The knife-slash had been deeper than he had at first thought. That meant he had to get it attended to. He could wait; but in the meantime it would be well to check things over.

He pulled out a match, flicked it on his thumb-nail and looked down. Yeah; quite a mess. He should tie a handkerchief around the leg. Then, as the match went out, he heard the girl's low exclamation.

"You're wounded!"

"Some." He removed his silk neck-scarf, struck another watch and shoved out his leg. "Mind tying this around—tight?"

One thing, Miss Laurel Dell knew her wounds. She fixed a tourniquet, twisting it with a sliver of wood she broke from the edge of one of the boxes. Above the

hum of the engine he heard her telling him, "You must have attention, at once."

"Sure," he conceded. "Once we're a bit further away."

"Further away" meant five miles. By then, daylight had definitely come, and he ran the canoe ashore on a sandy point. There, sitting on a boulder, he drew his breeches-leg out of the boot, ripped open the seam of breeches and underwear and displayed the gash.

It was a messy affair, raw-edged, bloody. He began picking at it, until the girl intervened.

"This needs proper treatment; hot water first. Have you a tea-pail?"

"In one of the boxes. But if you're lighting a fire and making a stay, that Thirty Special of mine will be a great comfort. Hand me it, Larry."

The girl read his meaning and brought the gun. Afterwards she lit a fire, hung the kettle to boil and, at his direction, went through his packsack and produced a clean cotton shirt.

"That for bandages," he observed.

The wound was cleansed. Now it did not look so dangerous. It was a glancing slash, longer than deep.

"Think the patient'll live?"

"He should," returned Laurel Dell; "if we had some antiseptic."

"Don't chew tobacco, me," grinned Jim; "or that would be the stuff. But the next best—" He hobbled over to the grub-box and brought back a slab of bacon. "Nothing like the skin of a dead pig!"

Despite her horrified arguments, he cut off the rind and slapped it over the wound.

"Now, with the gentle touch of a woman's hand, we'll be all set."

Still declaiming the pork-rind, the girl nevertheless bandaged it in place. And while the operation was in progress, Jim scowled upstream with his rifle at the ready.

But nothing untoward broke the calm of the early morning. True, a squirrel came to shrilling life and a pine-finch warbled its waking song; but what Jim dreaded most—the hum of another outboard motor, failed to materialize.

The girl finished at length and stood up to survey her handiwork. Flushed of face, her chin went hard.

"And we're supposed to be living in a law-abiding country! If the police would do their job and stop hounding innocent men, things of this sort wouldn't happen!"

"Don't love 'em very much, do you?" he observed.

"The police? Why should I?"

He shrugged. "Some of 'em are all right. Some of the old gang—"

"The old gang?"

He looked up at her, the hint of a smile on his lips. But the smile was hard, mocking. "You needn't publish the facts, Larry, but I wore the red coat myself, once upon a time."

"You mean—you were in the Mounted Police?"

"But we can still be friends!"

She ignored his sarcasm. "Why," she suddenly asked, "did you quit?"

His eyes fell, and he was silent for a moment. "'Quit'," he explained, gropingly, "isn't just the right word. Take a man after he's been four years North, and—well, he gets to think—"

"I'm sorry," she said in haste, flushing with embarrassment. "I've no right to pry into your affairs. Forgive me, please."

"It's nothing," was his casual answer. "Perhaps some day I'll tell you about it. Confession," he added with his crooked grin, "is good for the soul. I think I mentioned that before."

WITH the motor refueled, they made another ten miles. There seemed to be no sign of pursuit; and when they came to a willow-screened backwater, Jim swung into it and decided on breakfast. They landed a bare hundred yards from

the main river, pulled out the grub-box and lit a tiny fire. Jim's leg was stiffening, so the girl hunted wood while he cut bacon and opened a can of beans. The sun was now up, but the early chill made steaming coffee more than acceptable.

It was while they ate that the girl produced her map and handed it to Jim. It was drawn on the leaf of a notebook, crude, but intelligible enough. Too intelligible for Jim's liking.

"You can't miss Raining Lake on it," he pointed out. "And seeing that Grady had the map for a while, he wouldn't miss it either. Which means we'll have followers as far as there."

"But why should we have followers at all?" the girl demanded. "As I told you, I was an utter stranger to Grady. How could he have known I had the map?"

"Probably didn't know. But when he learned that Fred Dell's daughter had suddenly lit out for the North, it must have looked fishy to him." He folded the map and handed it back to her. "And those birds haven't forgotten us. We'd better hit the trail."

Two miles from there they turned down a branch of the main stream angling northeast. Here the going was swifter; narrower and more treacherous. There were rapids, eddies and whirlpools; yet Jim noted they were making faster time.

But he was not satisfied. In fact, there was something decidedly wrong. From his encounter with the three men at the Post he had reckoned them to be tough eggs; men who wouldn't quit at the first hurdle. And somehow he couldn't make himself believe he had seen the last of them. For one thing, there was too much at stake, as well as too much to be gained. He wondered if they were stranded at McAllister; but that was hard to credit. Joe Grady knew where they were going and would have equipped them for the trip. And if they had no canoe of their own, they could easily have hired one. Then out of his daydreaming fears he turned and saw the canoe behind him.

It was at least an eighteen-footer, driven by a powerful engine. Downstream she came, a quarter-mile distant and white-water cutting from her bows. His lips tightened, and he leaned forward and called to Laurel Dell.

She turned. Jim saw her look beyond him. Her face went rigid and she flashed him a glance of apprehensive inquiry.

"Rifle!" he ordered.

She gave it to him, first pumping the lever to see it was loaded.

Jim knew they were in a tough spot. His own motor was a three-horse; the one behind a four or a six. That meant they'd be overhauled in quick time. He looked around to take stock of his whereabouts, and remembered from an earlier trip that within a mile or so they would come to a cut-off that led into Thief Lake.

They might reach it; and halfway across the lake a bunch of Crees had their summer camp. Then a bullet whizzed by his head.

He didn't hear the bullet, but a sudden spurt of water a foot or two away advertised its arrival. He turned, to see the other canoe closing up.

Tough spot was correct. And, from his position, a tough spot in which to do any shooting. He had the motor to handle and the canoe to steer. He tried a single over-the-shoulder shot; but before he pulled the trigger knew that he was merely wasting shells. A moment more, and water spurted again.

Ahead was a bend in the stream. There might be time to get around it and hit for the bush. It meant sacrificing the canoe, and he wondered if the sacrifice would gain him anything. Then a third bullet smashed into the gunwale beside the girl's shoulder, glanced, and went screaming away.

His jaw went hard as murderous anger

took him. What kind of heels were these who made war on a girl? Given half a chance, he'd fight it out with them. But not with Larry Dell aboard.

They made the turn. Ahead was a sandbar, piled high with driftwood. He pulled into it, throttled the motor and, grabbing his rifle, jumped out.

"Here you are!" he yelled at her. "Take my place!"

She stared at him. "Why—what do you mean?"

The motor was running, kicking to be off. He clung to the canoe and barked her swift instructions.

"Hit—quick as you can! Near here is a backwater. Left-hand shore. Go down it and strike for the first point you see on Thief Lake. Bunch of Indians there. They'll look after you."

The girl stood up. "But—"

"Step on it!"

She climbed over the boxes and fuel cans and took the seat he had vacated.

"Here's the tiller!"

"Yes; but—"

"Shut up!" he barked. "Scram!"

And flinging on full-throttle, he gave the canoe a shove.

Chapter IV

FIRST BLOOD FOR JIM

IT ROARED away, bow high, stern low in the water. After one glance at it, he sprang for the tangle of driftwood. There, with the heavy timbers as a protection, he cuddled the rifle to his shoulder and waited for the pursuing canoe to appear.

There was more than a map or a fortune at stake. These strong-arm gorillas of Joe Grady's meant business. Grady, realizing that Larry Dell knew too much about the killing of Tom Blair, had doubtless given them plain orders. If they could get both the gold and the girl, so much the better. But they had to get the girl!

Jim grunted. Let 'em try it! But first they'd need to get him!

Suddenly, with a roar of power, the eighteen-footer swept around a rocky point. She was two hundred yards away and coming fast. Jim took aim; let go. The canoe seemed to wobble. She swung broadside, and made for the shore. He took a couple more shots; and the canoe disappeared behind the rocky point.

Jim ground his teeth savagely. He had been in too much of a rush. Should have allowed the men to come within sure range before he began to fire. His hasty action had now put him in an unenviable position. He was marooned in midstream and utterly at the mercy of those thugs ashore.

The next few minutes proved it. Hardly had the roar of the motor ceased than a bullet smashed into the driftwood a foot or so from his head. The swift action surprised him. He thought himself safe from observation; but he overlooked the fact that his white shirt made hiding impossible.

He dug deeper into the driftwood. There were a couple of big spruce trees, naked of bark, twisted of limb. He crawled into the angle where the two crossed each other. One would protect his front, the other his side. From there he took a cautious scrutiny.

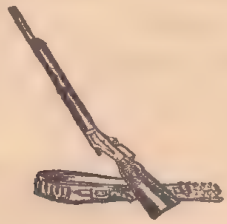
On shore, a whisky-jack broke into angry chattering. A squirrel screamed in rage. He peered at the spot from whence had come the uproar and saw a movement in a thicket of young balsams. This time he was in no hurry. He waited till he saw a man kneeling down and parting the bushes before him. The man was on a high cut bank—raising his rifle—.

Jim let him have it. There was a yell; the balsams swayed. And the man came bumping and slithering down the bank and onto the boulder-strewn shore.

"One of 'em!" grunted Jim. "And still two left."

Apparently the man he had hit had not been alone. There was more movement in the bush and Jim fired in rapid succession. Then the hammer of his gun fell on the empty chamber.

Jim's stomach crawled. In the excitement of the moment he had completely forgotten his additional shells. They were in his packsack in the canoe, being whisked away towards Thief Lake. He cursed his forgetfulness, blaming himself bitterly for the predicament he now was in.



But cursing could do no good. He was utterly at the mercy of these men unless he could find a way out.

But he knew there was none. All he could do was to burrow deeper into the driftwood and hope for the best.

The sun streamed down and the faintest of winds blew up-river. The throb of the girl's engine had long since died away, and in this fact alone Jim found comfort. Whatever the outcome of the mess he was in himself, the girl should be safe enough. Half an hour would bring her to the Indian camp on Thief Lake; and already fifteen minutes had gone.

Then the shooting commenced again. Bullets droned around his shelter like a swarm of bees. Bullets struck the driftwood, plowed in, or ricocheted away. Only the thickness of the twin spruce trees saved him. Half a dozen times he heard the dull *thwack!* as one of them took a direct hit. Then the shooting ceased abruptly and a man began to yell.

"Hey, there, you! Had enough?"

Jim made no answer, and the yelling started again. He gave a tight smile. Let 'em yell their heads off! They'd figure at last he was dead. Might even come over to investigate. Well; and let 'em come!

HIS reasoning was sound. One man continued to cover the sandbar and the other cut through the bushes towards the canoe. Soon he heard the engine being started, and the eighteen-footer cleared the point and picked up the man on shore.

Jim began to feel a trifle apprehensive. These men would be armed. They would be suspicious, wary. He had hoped to play possum with them and take them by surprise. He might yet, but he would need to exercise considerable care.

Crouching in his shelter, he heard the motor stop and the later sound of a keel grating on sand. He slumped forward, his head resting on a stick of driftwood as footsteps began to come his way.

"There he is!" he heard. "Cover him, till I check him over."

Sticks crackled, and at last he felt a hand grabbing him roughly. A gun was rammed in his ribs and his head pulled back.

"Got 'im, all right! Here, let's pull him out!"

Jim felt himself being skidded from his shelter, but, head hanging, he managed to look around. A rifle was leaning against a log, which meant that at most he would only have one gun to contend with. And as soon as he knew he was clear of the driftwood he flew into violent action.

The nearest man got it in the jaw; the other in the ear. He whirled for the rifle, but a booted foot tripped him. He went down and the boot caught him again. He felt himself go numb; blinked; gulped chokingly; and the muzzle of the rifle bored into his side.

"Game's up, Big Boy!" he heard. "Another move, and you get it!"

Still gasping, Jim staggered weakly. A hand grabbed him. He saw the blurred

figure of the thug who was holding him and the dancing outline of the canoe. A voice behind him spoke.

"Take him ashore!"

He was forced to the canoe, and fell into it amidships. The other men clumped in and the canoe was swung around. By the time they landed he was pretty much himself again.

He was curious to see these birds, and he had his chance. One man was bull-necked and heavy; the other short, weasel-faced and lean. Bull-neck had a cut over one eye and his partner's entire face looked as though it had been massaged with a grater. Jim took a vicious thrill from what he saw. This second man was doubtless the owner of the face he had stamped on as he jumped for the canoe at Fort McAllister. Bull-neck, too, knew he had been in a fight.

But there was something else Jim saw. Neither of these was a man of the open. They were dressed in breeches, boots and hats that were painfully new. Their faces were brick-red instead of tanned. In short, they looked like a couple of city-dwellers out for a spree in the bush.

Laurel Dell had referred to a man in Grady's office who looked like a mining-man. If he were one of the present party, he would probably be the one Jim had bagged with his first shot. The crumpled figure a few yards off at the foot of the cut bank. Jim could not see either of the two who faced him tripping around the North alone. They would have to have had a guide; and now that their guide was gathered with his fathers, they would be about as helpless as the Babes in the Wood.

Gun in ribs they herded him to a little clearing a few yards off. With the lean man covering him, Bull-neck began to speak.

"Where's the girl, Bub?" was his first demand.

Jim eyed him. "Some place you'll never find her."

"Yeah?" The man's face hardened. Jim now noticed the brutality of his jaw and the rat-trap line of his mouth. "Cocky, eh?" The man waited a bare moment before he asked his second question. "And where's the map?"

Jim smiled out of sheer perversity.

"No map; no girl. And a long, long way from home! Wouldn't Joe Grady just love you?"

A blaze of savagery came into the man's eyes and it was a warning to Jim. This duck was tough. It might be well not to press him too far.

"Listen!" said the man through gritted teeth. "We got no time to fool, see? The girl don't worry us no more, but we want the map. Do you tell us, or do we make you?"

Jim had a sudden sidelight on the nature of the man he had to deal with. With Laurel Dell out of the picture, the thug's interest in her had suddenly ceased. The gold was something else, however. Given forty thousand dollars worth of it, and Joe Grady could be left holding the empty bag. But Jim Dawson was equally determined that these mugs should no more get the gold than they should get the girl.

"The map's gone," he lied bluntly. "It went up in smoke two days ago."

"Did, eh?" Bull-neck chewed on this. "You figured you wouldn't need it no more? All right. Then tell us just where the gold is located."

That was an error on Jim's part and he knew it before the words had left his mouth. The man's next words confirmed the point.

"You'll tell us, or we got ways of makin' you tell."

Jim's heart-beats stepped up. He could estimate this man. He could either give the information voluntarily, or else they would torture it from him. He could lie, yes; give them false information. But would they believe it?

"Why are you asking me?" he de-

manded. "You saw the map, didn't you?"

"Saw it, yeah; but never had no good look at it." The man broke off to glare suspiciously at Jim. "But how d'you know I saw it?"

Jim grunted. "You'd be surprised at what I know!"

THE man's attitude suddenly changed. He shoved a hand into his shirt pocket, pulled out a carton of cigarettes and a stub of pencil. There were two cigarettes in the carton; one he shoved into his mouth, the other behind his ear. The carton itself he spread open and gave to Jim with the pencil.

"Never mind tellin'," he ordered. "Go ahead and draw her!"

Jim took them, sat down with the rifle still drilling into his back. He looked around, licked his lips; gave every indication of a man chased into a blind alley and seeking a way out. Bull-neck's patience began to grow thin.

"Quit your stallin'!" he bellowed. "Draw her, or you'll howl for the chance!"

Jim smiled inwardly. He would draw a map, yes; but these babies would be disappointed in their following of it.

For a moment or so he traced away, drawing rivers, a lake or two, a range of hills. He gave names to the rivers out of his head, marking finally a cross at the mouth of a creek he called the Muddy.

"Here—see!" he told Bull-neck. "You follow the river you're on for twenty miles till you come to a fork in it. Take this right-hand fork and it'll bring you to Lily Lake. Across the lake—right here—the river begins again. After that—well, there's more river that I've marked and more lakes. Finally, on the left-hand shore of this last lake, Birch Lake, there's a little creek. Right at the mouth of the creek you'll come to a crooked tamarack. The gold's buried at the foot of it."

"And how far from here?"

"About seventy miles," said Jim. "Straight north. And you can't miss it."

"And you can't miss this!"

There was a sudden smash in the jaw that knocked Jim endways. He rolled over twice, crawled up, and looked into the barrel of the lean man's rifle. But Bull-neck did the talking. He cursed Jim with foul oaths.

"Don't try slippin' nothin' over on me! I never saw much of the map, but I know somethin' about her! The gold's buried over a hundred and fifty miles from here; not seventy. The route's northwest. And where in hell on this map," he demanded, "is Rainin' Lake?"

Jim boiled inwardly. He had been proved a liar and a fool. And his jaw throbbed from the blow he had received.

"If you know so much," he snarled at Bull-neck, "go get the gold yourself!"

Bull-neck suddenly wheeled on his partner. "Keep that gun on him! I'll see if he'll loosen up!"

He strode to the canoe and came back with a length of light rope. He drew a sheath-knife from his belt, drove it into a nearby tree and spun on Jim.

"Get up!" To his mate, "Keep him covered!" And again to Jim, "Shove your hands behind you!"

Helpless as a trapped rat, Jim obeyed. He stood there, lips tight, eyes bleak. There was no need for Bull-neck to put his intentions into words, for the cruelty branded into his face told enough. But though he had given a show of submission, Jim had not sold out to Bull-neck. The time would come when Bull-neck stood between Jim and the rifle. And that was the moment Jim was waiting for.

But Bull-neck was cautious. He circled, to come on Jim from the rear. Jim's blood began to pound and his tongue felt dry. There was no alternative. He could either throw in the sponge, or go out in a blaze of glory.

His muscles tensed, waiting for Bull-neck to come within range—

Then a gun roared out above them.

JIM ducked. Bull-neck spun around. The lean man squawked. The voice of Laurel Dell cut like a whiplash:

"Drop that rifle!"

There was a fractional pause while Jim's heart almost skipped a beat. Then—

"Drop it, d'you hear! Or I'll *kill* you!"

The rifle went down with a clatter. Laurel Dell spoke to Jim himself.

"Get it, Jim! I'll hold them!"

He needed no second invitation. He picked up the rifle, then turned to the point from whence her voice had come.

"O.K., Larry! Let's have a look at you!"

Watching the two gorillas for a false move, he heard the bushes crackle, and a moment or so later knew she was standing beside him. He looked down, then; to the heavy .45 automatic she held.

"Holy Moses!" he exclaimed. "Where did you get the howitzer?"

The howitzer, as he called it, was trembling in her fingers.

"I—I borrowed it before I left Rockburg. I thought it might be useful!"

"Useful!" He took it from the girl. "It'll be useful right now!"

Herding the two men before him, he made them drag their canoe from the water and removed their engine. After that he told them to turn the canoe keel-up.

Then he picked up a forty-pound rock and drove it through its bottom.

"And if I did the right thing," he snarled at his captives. "I'd do the same to you—with a gun! Trouble is, I've too much on my mind. Beat it!" he suddenly roared. "Grab your blankets and grub, and start to roll!" They looked at him, questioningly. "Yeah; tell me I'm cuckoo! Guess I am!"

Bull-neck began to bluster, the shorter man to whine. Cripes! they told him, they didn't know the way. And if he thought—

But Jim wasn't thinking.

"I'll give you one minute. The bush isn't so smooth, but you'll cover ten miles between sunrise and sunset. Four days of that'll put you in McAllister."

They stared at him, but drew little comfort from his hard eyes. One picked up a bedroll while the other shoved some grub into a gunny sack.

"But we don't know the way!" they argued once more.

"Better men than you have gone places when they didn't know the way. They followed rivers. You can follow this river—and start right now!"

Mumbling, cursing under their breath, they shouldered the sacks and started to walk off.

"But there were three men!" argued the girl. "Where is the third?"

She hadn't noticed that crumpled figure. Jim moved so that she should not see it now.

"That's right," he agreed. "There were three. But as to where he went, the Lord alone knows."

One thing, the swift action of the past few minutes had taken the stiffness out of Jim's wounded leg. They walked downstream the two hundred yards to where their canoe was pulled ashore. Jim carried the surrendered rifle, and when they reached the canoe he handed the girl her automatic again. There was dancing laughter in his eyes.

"Who's the Guardian Angel now? I'd have been lost without you! Know what happened? I had a perfectly good .30 Special to make war with but no ammunition!"

The girl returned his smile. "I thought of that—when I was 'way downstream. But it gave me just a dandy excuse for coming back!"

"For coming back?"

"For paddling back!" she laughed, ruefully. "I killed that silly old engine, and couldn't get it started again!"

"But I thought I told you to hit for Thief Lake?"

"You did, yes. And that's something else—your manners. When you're excited, they're terrible. You told me to 'shut up,' to 'scram'; and yelled at me as though I were a three-year-old kid!"

"Fierce!" he grinned. "But you women are all alike—got to chew the rag and argue over everything you're told to do."

"*Told* to do?"

Jim laughed, boisterously. "You can't start a row with me. Not to-day. Not after the way you came back!"

"Do you think I'd run away—leave you to the mercy of those brutes?"

"I don't know what I think," he confessed. "You've got me badly puzzled." But ready to leave, he stood for a moment gnawing at his lip. "One thing I *do* know—I'm getting soft. Should have hogtied those birds to a suitable jackpine."

"And left them there? We may not be back for a week."

"As it is, they're loose; on the prowl."

"But what harm can they do? They don't look like men used to the North."

"They're not. They're town rats—or wolves. And a wolf is dangerous at any time." But noting the anxiety that began to gather on her face, he forced a laugh of dismissal. "I'm crazy, maybe. And I always was a pessimist. We'll go over to the sandbar and get my gun. And after that—North once more."

Chapter V

WINGS OVER RAINING LAKE

HAD Jim Dawson been able to forget the two men he had turned adrift, he would have had nothing to mar those days he spent with Laurel Dell. He began to know her as a real partner. He liked her courage; loved the little mannerism she had of tossing her curls with a jerk of her head; and he came to look for the tiny wrinkles that formed over her nose when she laughed. Had Jim realized it, he was treading dangerous ground; but all he knew at the moment was that Larry Dell was a regular feller and that he'd be sorry when the trip was over.

For the most part the weather held fine. They reached Raining Lake the third day and crossed it in the evening when the wind went down. It was years since Jim had visited the place, and they camped on the far shore. There, with a smoking fire behind them, they watched the colors of sunset fade in the west while the shadow of the earth crawled up in the east.

After that, and following their chart, they poled up a nameless river, portaged over a height o' land and went into a lily-padded lake. On another portage at the far end of the lake they stopped to boil the kettle.

"And to think that dad and poor old Tom Blair traveled all this way afoot," said the girl. Her eyes clouded over. "I wonder what the end will be?"

Jim shrugged. "Hard to say. But of one thing I'm very definite—it'll all come right for your dad. When we tell what we know, no court in the world would convict him. They'll want Joe Grady."

"But I promised I wouldn't go to the police. Not, anyway, about Shimmy Johnson's story."

Jim grunted. "Tell 'em what happened up here! With that to go on, they'll dig up the rest for themselves."

On the fifth day of the trip, their nerves began to tingle. Unless the map were out, one more bend of the creek they were traveling would bring them to their destination. The map had a mark on it at the

head of a little rapid. There was a notation—"White-quartz outcrop." A cross represented the outcrop, and on the other side of it was another cross.

They reached the place in the afternoon. Jim dragged the canoe ashore at the foot of the rapid, and with the girl hurried upstream. Suddenly he gave a yell. He pointed to a grove of jackpines.

"The rock, see? There she is!"

The rock showed milkily-white in the afternoon sun. They skirted its west side and began to kick at the ground. Jim suddenly laughed.

"You may have forty thousand dollars buried here, but I'm not ruining twenty-dollar boots getting it up!"

He returned to the canoe and brought the axe. He dug with the axe, and, when the ground became too rocky, cut a thick pointed pole and labored again. Ten minutes more and they unearthed a moose-hide bag.

"One of 'em!" whooped Jim. "Now for the other!"

The other was right beneath it, damp, clammy with moisture. Jim hefted them.

"Feature your dad and old Tom Blair packing these on an empty stomach! Boy, those old-timers were tough!"

The girl's eyes shone with excitement.

"Now we'll put up a fight for dad! And watch us win!"

They camped that night twenty miles on their homeward journey. And every minute found Jim on the alert. He had no tangible reason for uneasiness, and he tried to tell himself so. Those men he had turned adrift constituted no menace. They were, as he called them, typical Babes in the Wood; and after a forty-mile hike over muskegs and fly-infested swamps, they'd never want to see the North-country again. Right now they'd either be in McAllister or, if they were lucky, hitting for civilization on the return trip of the *Missigamow*. Why then his fears?

But the fears persisted. Notwithstanding the bluff he ran for the girl's benefit, he was nervous and ill at ease. He decided that once they reached Raining Lake he would quit the regular route south and take one he had been over years before. He knew it to be longer and more difficult to follow; but the matter of time was nothing compared to the safety of Laurel Dell.

And luck was with him. Two days later they came out on Raining Lake, to find the six-mile sheet as calm and placid as glass. Once they cleared Pelican Point he swung in a southwesterly direction, making for a notch in the distant, bluish hills.

THE crossing was uneventful. A mile from the opposite shore the motor ran out of gas. Jim refueled, and took time to roll a hasty cigarette.

The afternoon was hot, and though the lake was at present unruffled, woolly clouds in the west spoke of an approaching heat-storm. A flight of pelicans wheeled high in the blue; and near at hand a loon broke water, yelled, and disappeared again.

Jim was just ready to crank the motor when another sound caught his ear. It was the steady throb of an aeroplane engine. He looked around him, saw nothing, and mentioned the matter to the girl.

"But where is it?" she asked, shading her eyes.

Jim didn't know. But by the surging and booming resonance he knew the ship to be flying at a great height.

"Prospectors, I guess," he told her. "Going north the easy way."

Then suddenly he saw the ship. She was due overhead, flying at least at twelve thousand feet. He could have missed her entirely, but the sun caught her wings and splashed them with silvery brilliance.

They sat, caught by the romance and the beauty of the sight.

"It's wonderful!" breathed the girl. "There's something about it that thrills me! Think, there are men up there—trusting themselves to flimsy fabric and a powerful motor!"

Jim nodded, watched the ship continue on her way.

But suddenly she began to swing. The

sun caught her again. There was the flash of the propeller, the reflection from her windows; and she started down at dizzy speed.

Jim heard the girl's quick intake of breath.

"What's happening?" she squealed. "Look!"

The sudden drop of the plane may have looked all wrong, but in reality it was a power-dive made under superb control. The ship lost altitude rapidly; flattened out, and dived again. To Jim there was a significance in the maneuver. The plane was not only coming down fast, but her angle of dive would bring her to within a few yards of the canoe.

He turned suddenly, cranked the motor and went streaking shorewards.

The girl turned. Jim evaded her eyes by fixing on the ship, now a matter of but a thousand feet up and still coming. She banked, cut a wide arc that flashed her shadow across them—rolled on a wing and sideslipped recklessly.

JIM had a sudden crystallization of his fears. This plane was no prospecting outfit, but a unit sent out to locate himself and the girl. Something told him that the two men he had turned loose had managed to reach McAllister in time to catch the southward sailing of the *Missigamow*. Back in Rockburg they had immediately reported to Joe Grady. And here now was the plane.

Jim threw her another glance. She was a short quarter-mile behind them and two hundred feet in the air—a big cabin monoplane, racing towards them in a long flat dive that threatened to crash the canoe. He yelled at Laurel Dell, but there was no need of it. The girl was staring, horrified, beyond him.

Above the noise of his outboard engine came the roar of the one on the plane. It was deafening, fearful. Propeller whirling and pontoons almost skimming the water she bore down on them at nightmare speed. He yelled once more to the girl, hunched low—and the blast of the backwash snatched his hat from his head.

He dared to look up. The plane was beyond them, zooming. She banked, circled, tore at them with another of those blood-freezing dives. It was a lower one this time, one that straddled the canoe and sent oily exhaust in Jim's face. Out of his own horror, Jim paid tribute to the man at the controls. He was a pilot, that bird—

But suddenly, Jim began to hope. This wasn't murder; not, at least, of the out-and-out kind. There was something behind the play, and it looked to him like an attempt to break his nerve. Then he was left guessing again; for the ship banked suddenly and landed on the water two hundred yards behind him.

What the devil did it all mean? He tried to coax speed from his engine by an adjustment of the carburetor, and noticed that the plane followed him up.

He began to get an insight into things now. If his first guess had been correct and this plane was sent out to hunt them, those on board knew he had already lifted the cache of gold. For that reason they hesitated to ram him as they might have done.

He tested his theory by juggling the speed of the motor. But when he went fast the plane caught up with him; slow speed meant the plane trailed along behind. He was being convoyed with a vengeance; and he had a short half-mile of lake in which to do something about it.

His first impulse was to grab the rifle and spray the cabin of the plane. The idea might be sound; he might gun the passengers or put the engine out of commission. But it had its drawbacks. In the first place it meant pulling out his rifle, twisting in his seat and taking careful aim. And for all he knew—and what he suspected—those aboard had him covered already. They'd be watching him, only too eager for him to try something of the sort.

Then he saw the girl signaling him. She

leaned over, handing him her automatic. He grabbed it with a thrill of exultation and shoved it in his shirt.

Suddenly there was a roar. The plane put on speed, and drew up beside him. The door of the cabin opened, and a man with a rifle lowered himself to a pontoon. Jim blinked twice and looked again. The man was the bull-necked thug he had cut adrift on the river below McAllister.

But Jim's surprise passed. He yelled at the girl, ducking against the bullet he expected. When none came, he glanced up. Bull-neck was still standing there on the pontoon. With one arm hooked around a wing-strut, he held his rifle easily. And there was a grin on his face that Jim didn't like.

It was a grin of pleased anticipation; a grin that a cat might wear when playing with a mouse. And so far as the cat-and-mouse went, the simile was very apt. Jim, with his three horsepower, stood no chance at all against the plane with its three hundred horsepower. Except for the possible help of the automatic in his shirt, he was beaten, licked. Out here, he couldn't fight and he couldn't run. And if he should attempt both, the plane would blast down on him and chew him to pulp and matchwood.

Something of the same thought must have occurred to Laurel Dell. Jim saw her staring at Bull-neck while her breast heaved and her chin trembled. Then she turned quickly to face Jim, giving him a smile that was tight-lipped and brave.

HIS admiration for her increased a thousand-fold at that minute, but he had nothing but bitter reproach for himself. He should have figured this thing out better than he had. Turning Bull-neck loose had been a colossal mistake. A bigger one was in coming back over the route they had used in coming up. True, he had intended to quit it across the lake; but he should never have taken it at all. There were other routes he could have taken—continued north, angled west, and south from there. It would have meant a few days wasted in ultimately reaching Rockburg. But what were a few days against a disaster such as this?

He grew desperate. They were now only a few hundred yards from shore and the plane was cramping him there. He had the automatic within reaching distance. He could grab it—if Bull-neck would look the other way. But Bull-neck was on the job, ready, waiting, his rifle in his hand.

So he was forced into shore. The plane drew closer, its motor clicking, its wing shadowing the canoe from the sun. Through the windows Jim could see the pilot at the controls and the figure of another man beyond him; and the sight did him no good. Three men, against himself and a girl—

The canoe grounded and the pontoons of the plane slid up on the sandy beach. Bull-neck's fingers tightened on his gun as he stepped ashore.

"O. K., you!" to Jim. "Come on out with your hands up!"

The girl stepped ashore first, closely followed by Jim. The pilot clambered from the plane and Jim was not surprised to find the third man was the weasel-faced tough who had been Bull-neck's earlier companion. Bull-neck threw this man a nod.

"Frisk him; see what he's got!"

Jim, suddenly, was given the chance of making a tremendous decision. Should he try for the gun in his shirt, or should he submit to the thug's attention? There was the chance he could drag the gun, kill Bull-neck, and cover the other two. There was the risk that Bull-neck would down him at the first move he made. Either was a gamble; but the gamble was taken out his hands when the pilot produced a revolver and trained it on his heart.

"Might's well do my bit!" suggested the pilot, good humoredly.

"Sure!" agreed Bull-neck, while Jim's

spirits sank. "And now we got him covered, Art'll slip the cuffs on him." He pulled a pair of nickeled handcuffs from his pocket and tossed them towards Weasel-face.

THE moment awakened a recollection in Jim's mind. Once before these two thugs had tried to capture him. That time the girl had provided the big surprise. But he could not depend on her now any more than he could depend on the gun in his shirt. For both Bull-neck and the pilot meant business. They were ready, and if one missed, the other would get him.

Even the Weasel-faced Art had a gun; but he pocketed it as he retrieved the handcuffs. Only the strained face of the girl saved Jim from putting up a fight of desperation. The fight would be as suicidal as desperate; and he had Laurel Dell to think of. As long as he showed submission, they might overlook her.

But Jim knew that once he was shackled with his hands at his back his last chance was gone. He wondered if Art would realize that. To beat him to the thought he drew down his hands and held them before him. Now—would Art fall? And one look into Art's face told him he would. Art was nervous, jittery; he didn't fancy his job. But he went through with it, and lost no time in backing out of reach.

"Yeah; but frisk him!" bellowed Bull-neck.

Again Art came forward, ran his hands over Jim's body—and located the automatic.

"You see?" Bull-neck turned to the pilot. "Now you believe he's bad? But we'll tame him!"

To Jim, the whole thing was absurd and preposterous. It reeked of melodrama. It might all have been some gargantuan joke. To begin with, there was the plane. She bore her registration letters—C-CAB—as well as the name of an influential flying-concern right on her hull. Men of the stamp of Bull-neck and Art might wallow in crime, but it was unthinkable that Saskatchewan Airways would back them up. Then he received enlightenment—from the pilot himself.

Said the pilot to Bull-neck:

"You cops take no chances. And I can't say I blame you!"

The words almost stunned Jim. Cops! *Cops!* A pair of murderous hijackers working under the guise of the police! He gave a vicious, jeering laugh.

"So you're a cop!" he flung at Bull-neck. "Some wow of a cop! Gimme five minutes—"

"See?" Bull-neck broke in. "Didn't I tell you? But if he's got the gold in his canoe, that'll prove our case!"

He strode to the canoe, flung the dunnage this way and that and finally came up with the two moosehide bags.

"Here!" he crowed. "Sling an eye over this, and tell me he didn't kill Tom Blair!"

Something snapped in Jim Dawson's crowded brain. Art was the nearest, and he got a double-fisted crash in the jaw that sent him spinning. The pilot inherited the next. Bull-neck would have got the same, but he turned in time. He had no chance to pick up his rifle, but he ducked and swung a club-like fist clean to Jim's jaw. Jim spun around twice and dropped to the sand.

CHAPTER VI

TRAIL'S END

FOR ten minutes he was out cold; and when his head cleared he felt himself being dragged aboard the plane. Through a mist he saw the girl forced into a chair and he collapsed into one behind her. After that he was groggily conscious of the engine roaring into life; but it was some minutes before his faculties completely returned.

They were over Raining Lake and nosing south. The sun was well on its way towards the western hills, and at any time he might have appreciated the beauty that he saw.

But there was no beauty in Bull-neck who sat almost in his lap; nor in Art who ordained himself an escort to the girl. Ahead, the pilot was doubtless complacently pleased with himself for his part in the capture of a dangerous criminal. And the thought burned up Jim Dawson anew.

What the end was to be he couldn't say, but new-found determination flowed into his body with returning consciousness. He wasn't licked yet! Up here, at a few thousand feet over the lake, was no time to start a roughhouse; but the plane would have to come down eventually, and his chance would come.

The trip took an hour and a half. Dusk was settling when they came over Rock Lake and went into a long, flat dive. Ahead, another five miles away, was Rockburg. There, lights were already twinkling; but for a pontoon-equipped ship, Rock Lake provided the only landing spot.

They skimmed the water and taxied into the ramp. Jim found himself shivering; not from chill but from suppressed excitement. Something would happen soon—

He and Laurel Dell were herded from the plane and towards a waiting automobile. Jim wondered if this were to be his chance; but Bull-neck had discarded his rifle for an automatic that bored steadily between Jim's shoulder-blades. Well, if not now, perhaps later.

The automobile was a five-passenger and driven by a man with a low-peaked cap. Art, after loading the moosehide bags, opened the rear door, motioned the

girl to get in and stepped to one side to allow Bull-neck to follow. Bull-neck did, but backed in so that his gun should never be off Jim for a second.

"In that corner," he said to Jim. "And you, Art—up front."

There was a last word from the pilot, a squalling of gears, and the automobile shot ahead down a poplar-lined trail.

Suddenly, Jim's confidence melted. A ghastly premonition took its place. The last chapter he had been thinking about would be written somewhere between here and Rockburg. These men would not dare to take him into Rockburg; or, if they took him, they dared not take the girl. There would be hundreds on the streets, and one scream from her would bring help at once. The thought burned into his brain. *Between here and Rockburg it would happen!*

Taken for a ride! Hauled out of the car and dumped beside the trail! And Laurel Dell—? His heart pounded with sick apprehension. Clammy moisture broke out on his forehead and in the palms of his hands—

It was dark in the trees save for the beam of the car's headlights. The rutty road swayed and jostled them together. Bull-neck leaned forward to speak to the driver for a moment—and Jim acted at once.

An upward swipe of his arm next to Bull-neck sent the man's gun to roaring through the roof. A double-handed jolt caught the man behind the ear. And Art, in the front seat, clambered up and yelled.

BUT Jim was ready. He grabbed Art's gun, drove a savage blow that smashed the man's head through the windshield and left him hanging there. The driver of the car screamed; turned. The car itself thundered into a stand of birches, skidded on two wheels and rolled on its side.

But Jim was out before it had stopped. He wrenched at a door and managed to free Laurel Dell. She swayed and held her head, and Jim led her to a seat on a nearby hummock.

There was a flash, a blinding explosion. Jim spun around. The car was on fire. He saw a figure staggering past and knew it

for the driver. He caught the man and yanked him to safety.

But there was something else—the slam of an automatic. He had a glimpse of a man rushing at him, firing as he came. It was Bull-neck, face distorted in the glow of the burning automobile.

Jim's gun that he'd taken from Art came up. Jim's was the advantage, for Bull-neck was in plain silhouette. Jim fired; felt the gun kick in his hand; fired again.

Bull-neck was only a dozen paces away, staggering and swaying, but his gun vomiting crimson streaks. Then, suddenly, at Jim's fourth shot, his knees sagged. He spun around, head drooping; and fell.

Then something else came to Jim. That which they had fought for, the two sacks of gold were still in the car. He dropped the gun and ran for the blazing wreck. The roof was burning and he kicked at it until he had a hole sufficiently big for him to get his shackled hands inside. It cost him singed wrists, but he located the gold and pulled it out.

But that was all he could do. The forepart of the car was long since a blazing pyre for the luckless Art. But the driver was clear; and so was the girl; and so was he.

He moved towards her. Bull-neck lay where he had fallen and there was no need for any investigating there. Jim knelt at his side, however, turned him over and located the keys of the handcuffs. He gave them to the girl and she liberated him.

Laurel Dell seemed stunned. The driver, on the other hand, lit a cigarette and smoked with cold apathy. Jim studied the man for a moment; then shot at a venture.

"That Grady's hack?"

The man nodded.

"You been driving it long?" pressed Jim.

"Just to-night. Boss said he had a coupla friends comin' in on the plane. Said for me to meet 'em."

"You met 'em!" was Jim's grim retort. After a moment he spoke again. "Sure that's Grady's car?"

"Cert'nly I'm sure!"

"And this man I plugged—the bull-neck guy—are you sure he was a friend of Grady's?"

"Friend of his? He was Grady's right hand! Sort of a ward-boss."

"And you'd swear that on the Bible?"

The man gave a sudden start. "Well—I dunno. But cripes, everybody knows them things!"

Jim dangled the handcuffs. "Then the cops'll need you bad."

The man edged away, fear in his eyes. But Jim crowded him.

"I killed one guy tonight, possibly two." Jim's voice was cold, deadly. "Will you wear these—to please me?"

The man gave way.

After a moment Jim walked to the glowing car and came back with the bags of gold. One he gave to the driver.

"We're hiking, Mac," he told him. "And it's a long way to town. If you know of any farmhouse where we can pick up a team, you'd better hit for it. Otherwise, you take that long walk."

"There is a farm—a Bohunk's place—a quarter-mile east of here," offered the man. "He's got an old flivver, if that'll do."

"A flivver," said Jim, "would do us fine."

WITH the man in the lead, they started. The girl seemed weary, and she clung to Jim's arm. But after a hundred yards or so her old spirit came back to her.

"Do you think we're really safe at last?" she asked him.

"I'd imagine so," grinned Jim. "Unless this Bohunk we're hunting is as tough as Bull-neck was. And that don't seem possible."

"And you think that our story, backed by the evidence of Grady's driver, will mean freedom for Dad?"

"I most certainly do."

She gave a disgusted little sniff. "Now, with all the facts prepared for them, perhaps the police will get on to their job."

"The police," Jim told her, "have done their job already."

She seemed to debate his words. "Have done their job already? Why, when did they do it?"

Jim laughed. "Every day since the *Missigamow* pulled out of The Landing. They made a mess of it at times; they weren't as careful as they might have been; but if they didn't bring back their man alive, they brought back their girl!"

He felt her pull away from him.

"You—you mean—*you're* the Police?"

"Yes," said Jim; and there was a little thrill of pride in his tone. "The Mounted Police."

"But you told me that day on the river you had quit them!"

"I said that 'quit' wasn't just the right word. What I did say was that I used to wear the red coat—once upon a time. And I did wear it, up until a week before I met you on the boat. You see," he elaborated, "I got into Rockburg coming out on leave from a four-year spell on the Mackenzie. I knew the McAllister and Raining Lake country from serving in there ten years ago. And when the O.C. in town wanted a man to go along as a sort of bodyguard for you, my leave was shot. But at that," he added as an afterthought, "I've had a wonderful ten days!"

Jim's explanation seemed to throw Laurel Dell all out of gear. She tried to ask a dozen questions at once, but framed only one of them.

"Bodyguard?" she repeated. "What do you mean—a bodyguard for me?"

JIM laughed softly. "You thought the police—city and Mounted—were easily duped. And that's what Grady thought as well. But you didn't fool 'em; and neither did he. The city cops never thought for a moment your dad killed old Tom Blair, but they had to hold him against the verdict of the coroner's inquest. They knew nothing about the map being stolen from Joe Grady, but they did hear that you had booked passage for the North and they were already suspecting things. So when our O.C. heard that three of Grady's hirelings had booked passage also, it looked bad for Miss Larry Dell. That's where I came in."

The girl gave a sharp little cry. "I promised that dope fiend, Shimmy Johnson, that I wouldn't give his information to the Police. And I've done it already!"

"Yeah," agreed Jim, "you've done it already. Still, his evidence don't mean so much. I've lots without it."

"But I promised him. And if he ever gets to know—"

"Always keep your promises?" asked Jim.

"Always!"

"Then I want you to promise me something. Will you?"

The girl hesitated. Jim felt her fingers tighten on his arm. "Well?"

"Promise me you'll never go batting around the North again, alone."

"I'll promise," she agreed with a laugh. "And it'll be easy to keep."

"Accent on the 'alone.'" pointed out Jim. "Of course, you'll be going north again; but it mustn't be alone."

"*I'll* be going north?"

"Well, of course. I'm only out on leave. Or," he asked, whispering in her ear, "don't I make myself quite plain?"

She stopped dead, turning to face him. "You mean—?"

"Sure. That you'll come back with me."

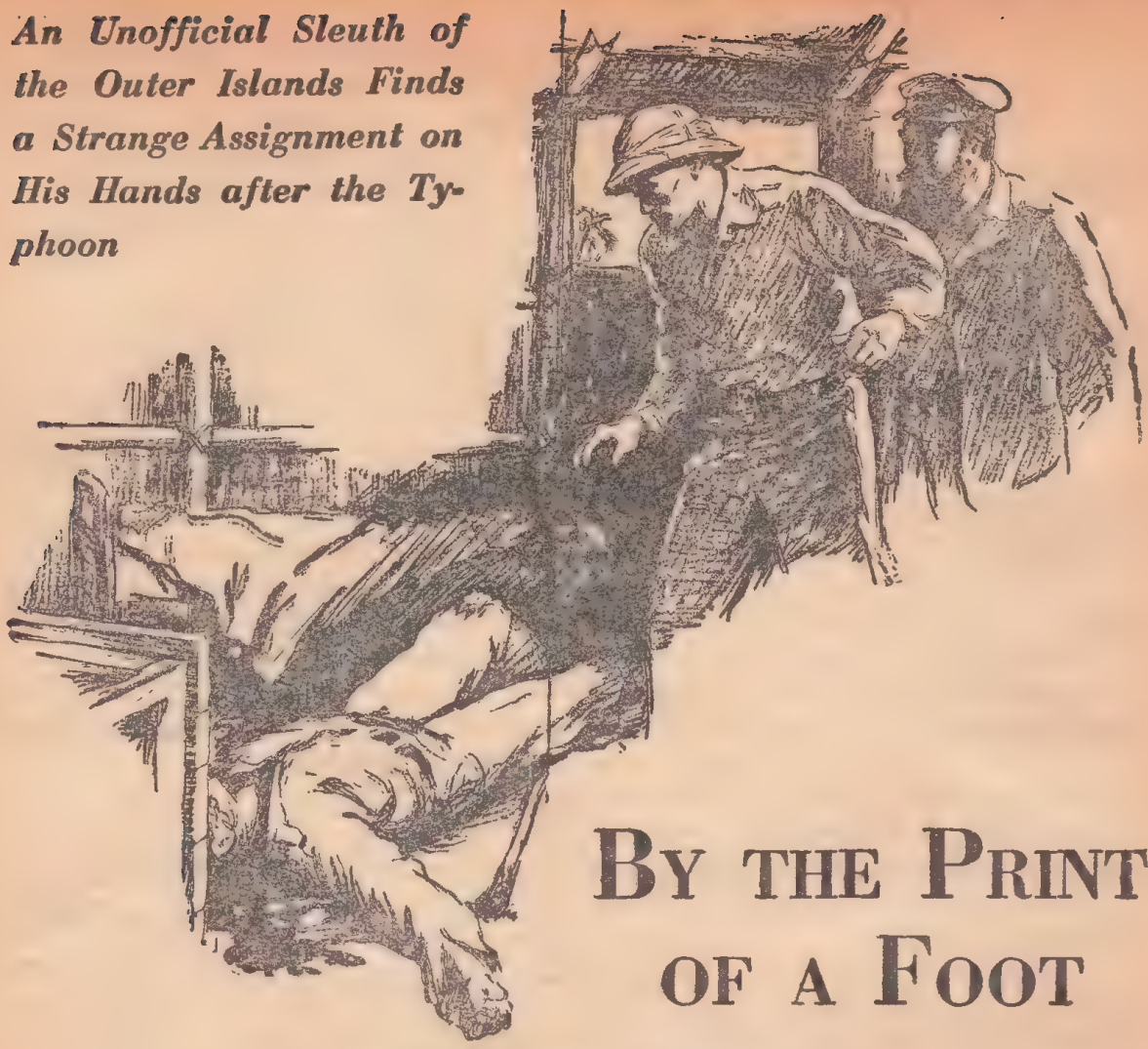
He looked down at her slim figure in the darkness. Her hand was trembling on his arm.

"Then I'll promise."

Up ahead, the driver of Grady's car had also stopped.

"Keep a-going!" counselled Jim. "Everything's quite all right!"

An Unofficial Sleuth of the Outer Islands Finds a Strange Assignment on His Hands after the Typhoon



By the Print of a Foot

By HERMAN PETERSEN

Author of "The Stairway to the Sun," etc.

AT DAWN Bradley Westcott for the first time in three days took down the stout bar from the front door of the bungalow. He opened the door and stepped out to the wide veranda—a tall, dark, weary-eyed young man dressed in badly wrinkled white and wearing upon his haggard face the heavy stubble of a black beard three days untouched by a razor.

The morning seemed still, unbelievably still. It seemed so still that Westcott, as he walked across the veranda, walked on his tip-toes. For the moment he had a dread of making a small sound, even such a small sound as the scuffing of a foot. It seemed to him that the whole world was most loosely hung together by this stillness which was a thing of the most fragile nature, so fragile in fact that even the expulsion of a sharp breath would shatter it—and then the whole universe would become roaring chaos again. That was his dread, and he held it until he heard the thunder of the unseen sea, the crash of breakers on the reef, the pound and hiss of surf on the beach; and high against the mountain wall which towered so abruptly at the rear of the bungalow, a stiff wind boomed over the forest. These sounds—and the world still hung together.

For three days and nights a hurricane,

roaring out of the west, had torn at the island. In its maddest fury the rushing wind had filled the world with a voice such as Westcott never before had heard; hour after hour of an unchanging dissonance which to him had seemed the very utmost in sound. It had been overwhelming; and now—it was still again. Sometime before midnight the great force of the storm had blown itself out. With the passing of the hours since the wind had fallen away until by dawn no more than the stiff breeze boomed.

Westcott walked down the steps from the veranda; but it was late in the afternoon before he got around to have a look at his groves. Ten thousand palm trees, like warriors with plumed headdresses marching, in wide ranks and long files—so they had been when last he had reviewed them four days before. Today—a tangled pile of corpses, with here and there a battered veteran standing drunkenly as if ready to fall and lie with the other dead.

Westcott sat down on one of the wind-felled trees. In the west the brazen sun dipped hot rim in the cooling sea and began to sink. Shortly it was night; the stars came out; but Westcott sat without moving. He did not move when in the darkness a shadowy figure came toward him. A slender girl she was, medium tall, her blond hair coiled low on the back of her head, for dress a dark, figured *pareu* wrapped about her in simple native fashion so that her arms and shoulders were bare. She walked quietly up behind Westcott, stood there very close to him; but she did not speak or touch him or do anything to attract his attention.

After some minutes it was Westcott who spoke. His voice was like the voice of a man racked with pain, thick, dried out. He said:

"Well, Sarah—it looks as if everything is finished for us!"

"My dear!" she said softly. She put an arm about his shoulders. "Not everything. It's just the trees that are gone."

"I'm wiped out, Sarah!"

"You're tired," she said.

HE WAS tired. When he had left his bungalow at dawn, he had gone first across the lagoon, its surface thickly floated with debris of the storm; and at the house of Antoine Deprez, the Administrator, he had been impressed, willingly enough, into the service of searching for dead and injured; and throughout the day he had led a little band of natives up one narrow valley and down another. By midmorning he had been forced to take over Deprez's end of the search in addition to his own. The Administrator, softened and fattened by too many years in the tropics and by lips too frequently put to the cup, had given out. In a state bordering on collapse he had to be taken back to his bungalow; and Adolphe Gasson, the one and only gendarme on the island, had found an unbroken jug full of rum, and shortly afterwards he had fallen by the wayside.

"As usual," Sarah said, "everything depended upon you. I know. I was watching."

There had been dead to bury. There had been injured with wounds to bathe and bind, with broken bones to set and splinter. It was near to sundown before the work was done. Weary and dirty, stained a little with the blood of the hurts of others he had tended, Westcott then had made his way alone to the place of his groves.

For minutes he had stood and with dulled eyes looked upon the ruin of all he owned. Ten years he had lived on this island. Ten years he had labored in these groves. As a young man of twenty-two he had come from the States, a few thousand dollars in his pockets. With those dollars he had bought the plantation. It had been half a jungle then, groves gone wild through lack of culti-

vation. For ten years then he had sweated. He had cut and burned, cut and burned again; made seed beds, set out trees. Ten years—and he had had ten thousand bearing trees and more coming into bearing. His investment had begun to return him dividends, which he had regularly turned back into the plantation. Actually he was beginning to make a little money—before this storm had come out of the west. Now, after three days of wind, even his copra sheds were gone and with them the stored copra made during the past six months.

"I'm wiped out, Sarah," he said. "Ten years of work wiped out by three days of wind!"

She put a hand under his stubbled chin, drew his head back against herself.

"You're alive, Bradley. You have no wounds, no broken bones. You have your health. You can begin over again, just as you began ten years ago. It will be hard of course, but you can do it. You have the courage, I know. Right now you don't think you have. That's because you are tired. When you are rested everything won't look so black to you."

He said in his dried out voice: "Everything will look black enough. Everything is different from what it was ten years ago. I had a little money then. Besides, when I bought this plantation there were over five thousand bearing trees. I had an income right from the start, enough to keep me going and to help with extending the place. I haven't anything now. There aren't a hundred trees standing and they are stripped bare."

"You will have to have trees of course."

"It takes seven years at least to bring a tree into bearing. I can't possibly manage that long."

"I know. You must have bearing trees at once."

"Where will I get them?"

"The old Lebeau plantation. Apply to the Administrator for a lease."

"I applied last year," Westcott said in his weary voice. "Deprez refused to approve it."

"Because he was jealous of you," she declared knowingly.

THAT, Westcott realized, was true. It was the real reason behind the Administrator's refusal to approve Westcott's application for a lease of the old Lebeau plantation. Deprez was jealous of him. Why? Because in the ten years he had been on the island Westcott had grown to be a power. Deprez was Administrator in name; Westcott was Administrator in fact, a situation which had grown entirely out of Deprez's disinclination to exert himself either physically or mentally any more than he was absolutely obliged to do. This very day had been an example of that.

It all had begun ten years back, shortly after Westcott's coming to the island. There was a murder done, and Westcott, eager then to be helpful and to show his friendliness with the gesture of giving unstintingly of his time and energy to the force of law and order, which the person of Antoine Deprez represented, had with his cleverness and with no small measure of good fortune solved the mystery and delivered the killer into the Administrator's hands. The credit of course had gone to Deprez; and from that time on he had made constant and increasing demands upon the young planter. Westcott

was willing enough to serve in whatever way he could, even to the keeping of Deprez's records and to the making of his reports, Deprez at first helping there with the difficulties of the French language; and so it was natural perhaps that those who had dealings with the Administrator came in time to seek out Westcott and do their business with him. He never had asked pay in any way for his services.

The only favor he ever had requested was for a lease of the abandoned Lebeau plantation, which land joined his own to the south.

"Non," Deprez bluntly had refused the request. "You own half the island now. If you had the Lebeau place—you would want to be named Administrator next."

With those words Deprez had revealed his jealousy and his fear of Wetscott's growing power; but in the days since he had continued to demand Westcott's help.

"You must apply again for the lease," Sarah advised. "He can't refuse you now."

"You don't know Deprez," Westcott said without much heart. "I might as well ask him to let me take Daley's pearls for a stake."

"Daley's pearls?"

"That packet of pearls found on old Daley when he died. Deprez is holding them until the Governor at Papeete sends instructions concerning their disposal. Deprez keeps them in his belt."

"I had forgotten them," Sarah said softly. She stroked Westcott's right cheek and for a long time she said nothing more. Then, "I must go now. Father may be looking for me. He mustn't find me here." She bent and kissed Westcott on the forehead. "You go home now. Go to bed—sleep—and don't worry. Everything will come out all right."

"I wish I thought so."

"Then just think so. And the next time Deprez demands a favor of you, you demand that lease in return."

She patted him on a cheek, and then she was gone in the night.

FOR several days Westcott grew even more disheartened. By actual count he found he had exactly eighty-nine cocopalms standing. They were stripped bare of leaf and nut. The rest of his trees lay in such a tangle that only fire could clear the land. Even his seed beds were ruined. On the Lebeau plantation in the valley to the south, that valley protected from west winds by a high ridge of basalt, the damage done by the hurricane was negligible, nuts thrown down from the trees at the southernmost end of the plantation, a few trees stripped of their fronds.

The irony of fate, Westcott thought. Here, untouched by the blow which had wiped him out, were thousands of trees heavy with fruit, fruit which no one but he wanted. That fruit he needed desperately; but, because for ten years he had given freely of himself to serve the Administrator and by so doing, and without any desire for advantage on his part, he had put himself above Deprez in the eyes of the islanders, the Administrator now refused to approve the application Westcott had made for a lease of the place.

The situation was maddening. His ten years of acquaintance with Deprez had given Westcott insight enough into the character of the man that he knew better than to make any supplication for assistance. Such a plea would fall on deaf ears; Deprez would be more adamant than ever about refusing approval of the application for lease. What he needed, Westcott realized, was an opportunity to demand the lease in return payment for some service demanded of him by Deprez; but such an opportunity would have to be hand made to fit the situation, and Westcott was not one to engineer such a scheme. His sense of fairness was so overbalanced as to cause him to lean backwards.

For more than a week he avoided walking within hailing distance of Deprez's house; nor did he meet Sarah Talen at their trysting place high in the valley. He had not the heart to see the girl and talk with her. This was the year they planned to marry, after Aiken Talen, Sarah's father had been given transportation to the States. The money Westcott would have received through the sale of the six months' accumulation of copra, which had been stored in the sheds demolished by the hurricane, was to have been used for that purpose.

Sarah Talen was twenty-two years old. Born in the States, her father had brought her to Fatu when she was nine years old. Aiken Talen had been looking then for a place to live an easy life; but he had not found it. Even on Fatu one must do some work to live; beach combing is a thing of the past. Long since the shiftless, no-account Talen had had his fill of the islands. He wanted to return to the States; but whenever he earned a few francs he bought rum with it—and then he beat Sarah. To be rid of the man, Sarah agreeable to the plan, Westcott had decided to pay Talen's passage from Fatu to San Francisco. Once Talen was that far from Fatu he never would be able to get back. Then, Westcott thought, he and Sarah could marry and live in happiness; and toward that future he had worked.

All that was changed now. Cherished hopes were laid low by three days of wind. Westcott had less than a thousand francs in cash. That was small change really. The future, what he could see of it, looked dismally black. He felt utterly helpless.

LATE one night of the second week following the hurricane, Westcott sat on the veranda of his bungalow with Captain Bellott, master of the trading schooner *Hermione*. Bellott was a short, stout, black-bearded man, and he had handled the copra made by Westcott ever since Westcott's coming to the island. Too, on his semi-annual calls, he had helped the young planter much with practical advice. Westcott liked the man and always had him to the house for dinner and the night whenever the *Hermione* stopped at Fatu.

They were discussing Westcott's loss and the uncertainty of the future when they were interrupted by the sound of footsteps of someone hurrying up the path toward the house. Westcott listened a moment and then he said:

"That's Adolphe Gasson and he's drunk. Deprez must want me for something or other. He can go to the devil!"

"Softly! Softly!" Bellott advised, and he lifted a warning finger. "The devil couldn't use Deprez—but you can."

Rum-scented and breathless, the bony gendarme stumbled up the veranda steps.

"Monsieur — messieurs!" he gasped. "The Administrator—he has been murdered!"

He collapsed then into the nearest chair. Apparently he was too winded and too upset to say any more; but he could swallow. Westcott gave him a stiff drink of cognac. Adolphe downed it at a gulp.

Bellott suggested, "We'd better go across and see what has happened." And Westcott readily agreed. For the momoment he was alarmed.

Westcott's house was built on a bluff overlooking the lagoon. With Bellott's help he got Adolphe on his feet; and then the three of them quit the veranda and took the path to the roughly cut basalt steps down the forty-foot face of the bluff to the water. Here, to a floating platform, several outriggers and one whaleboat were moored.

"We'll take the whaleboat," Westcott said.

Adolphe slumped on the stern seat. Bellott and Westcott manned the oars and rowed across the lagoon. Deprez's

house sprawled in the shadows of leaning palms. A white-shaded kerosene lamp burned on a littered veranda table.

Deprez sat sogged in a wicker chair—and he was far from dead. A short, very fat man, always wheezy of breath, he wore only a pair of soiled white pajama trousers which seemed about to burst at the seams with his bulk. When the three men came up on the veranda, Deprez made a great effort to speak; but he succeeded only in producing gulping and choking sounds in his throat. His black eyes rounded wide. Sweat streamed down his dirt-streaked face, made rivulets down the dirtied white nakedness of his heaving chest.

"Bleu!" at last he managed to gasp weakly. "I am still—strangled!"

WESTCOTT demanded, and he spoke sharply, "What happened?"

Deprez panted, "The pearls, *m'sieur!* The pearls—" He choked up again.

"Daley's pearls? The ones you've been holding since Daley died?"

"Ah, oui!" Deprez gulped. "They have been stolen!"

"Who stole them?" Westcott demanded; and when Deprez answered that with a shrug, "Didn't you see the thief?"

"But *non!*" With a pudgy hand Deprez wiped sweat from his fat face. "I was attacked from behind!" He went on after a few moments of quick, noisy breathing. "I was sitting right here—in this chair! The assassin came up behind me—quietly, *m'sieur!* I did not hear a sound!"

Westcott said accusingly, "You were asleep."

"Non!" Deprez exploded indignantly. "No more than I am now. I was cutting my toe nails. Someone put a bag over my head." He spat. "Phoo! It was a dirty bag!" He spat again, went on. "When I tried to tear it away, my hands were caught and tied. *Bleu!* The devil was quick with a rope! In an instant, *m'sieur,* I was fast to the back of this chair!"

"How did you free yourself?"

Deprez swore. He glared at the sparse Adolphe Gasson who stood near the lamp-lighted table. Distress, or so Westcott thought, made redder than usual Adolphe's bony face, drooped the ends of his enormous dyed jet black mustache.

"If that drunken pig had been awake, then I would have a different story to tell," Deprez declared angrily. "But no! I must shriek out my throat before I can wake him, make him hear to come and untie me!" He damned Adolphe again. *"Cochon!* Get out of my sight! The Governor shall hear of this!"

The ends of his mustache drooping dejectedly, the rummy-breathed Adolphe took himself unsteadily away. Bellott took a seat in the hammock slung across one end of the veranda.

Deprez reached to the table for a bottle and helped himself to a half tumbler of cognac. He drank the liquor with noisy gulpings, wiped his mouth with the back of a hand.

"You are my good friend, *m'sieur,"* he said to the dark-faced Westcott. He smiled a stained-toothed smile. "You have the ingenuity to solve these puzzles. Use your cleverness now—find me the thief."

On the unswept floor beside the Administrator's chair lay the bag which, so Deprez claimed, had been slipped over his head, also the length of three-eighth-inch rope with which he said he had been bound.

The bag, made of burlap, smelled strongly of rancid copra. When Westcott picked it up it shed dust and a shower of fine dirt—and a shell hairpin.

Westcott dropped the bag to make another small cloud of dust. He picked up the hairpin, closed it in a hand. Deprez, he observed, paid no attention to him.

"You don't know who attacked you?" he asked the Administrator. There was a slight note of disbelief in his voice.

Deprez replied testily, *"Non.* I have no eyes in the back of my head."

Westcott held his hand almost under Deprez's ball of a nose. He opened his fingers and disclosed the shell hairpin.

The Administrator's black eyes rounded so wide they seemed about to pop from his head. He gasped:

"Abigail's!"

"Then it was Madame Tissot?"

Deprez flung both arms above his dirtied bald head in vehement protest.

"Non, non!" he fairly shrieked. "That clumsy cow could not have done it! Impossible!" After a few moments he added, somewhat though not much more calmly, "Besides, I would have known her, even behind my back. Phoo!" he spat with disgust. "She wears a stench that would sicken a dog."

THE chair in which Deprez sat faced the screened door at the head of the steps leading to the veranda. The only other door opening on the veranda was back of and slightly to the right of Deprez's chair. This door led to the bungalow living room. It hung on spring hinges that swung either way and the night breeze played with it, made it sway back and forth, the hinges creaking a little.

"Looked around any?" Westcott asked Deprez.

"No." The Administrator was pouring himself another half tumbler of cognac. "What is there now to look for?"

Thoughtfully Westcott eyed the creaking, wind-swayed door. If, as Deprez claimed, he had been attacked from behind as he sat in his chair, and if he had not seen the person who had attacked him, then his assailant had come on to the veranda through that door. There was no other way anyone could reach the veranda without being seen by the Administrator. Of course Deprez might have been asleep; but Westcott doubted that. He knew too well that the Administrator did much of his sleeping through the heat of the day.

"I'm going to take the lamp a few minutes."

Deprez voiced no objection. Westcott took up the lamp from the table and with it in a hand he pushed through the swinging door into the living room which in its disarrangement of dusty, web-draped, moth-eaten furniture had more disorder about it than the veranda. Bellott left the hammock and followed Westcott.

"Whoever did it came from this room," Westcott remarked to the captain. "Opening that door didn't make it creak any more than it does when the wind sways it. I want a look at the windows."

Four windows gave air to the room which fronted the entire house. Two of these windows looked out on the veranda, a third faced eastward and the sea, while the fourth admitted the first light of the late moon just clearing the mountain peak.

"I'm betting on the window that looks at the moon," Westcott said, moving toward that side of the room. "It seems to me the most likely one." By the window he halted and held the lamp slightly higher than his head. "Just as I thought."

The screen had been removed. It leaned against the outside wall of the house, to the right of the window.

Swinging his long, white-trousered legs over the sill, Westcott dropped to the ground. Bellott followed him. A trail, broken through a knee-high growth of coarse grass, led away from the house.

"Freshly made," Westcott declared.

Holding the lamp above the level of his eyes, Westcott started to follow the trail; and Bellott walked after him.

Westcott stopped when he came to an oblong patch of cultivated ground rowed with green.

"Adolphe's lettuce bed." Lowering the lamp, he squatted on his heels. "Someone took a short cut across it."

Across the lettuce bed footprints, widely spaced, continued the trail from the house. Hands on knees, Bellott bent over and looked down at one of the footprints.

"A barefoot child! He was running!"

Westcott applauded the deduction with, "Very good! But—let's change that 'he' to 'she'." He added quickly, "Remember the hairpin."

"You mean Madame Tissot?" Bellott straightened up. "I haven't seen her in years. I've an impression of her being something like the Administrator now—fat. She must be all of forty."

Westcott smiled thinly. "Forty without a doubt. But not fat. The Madame is not at all a large woman. And she's very vain of her small feet."

"Then these footprints might be hers?"

"If they aren't—" Westcott did not finish the sentence, not aloud. An uneasy frown etched a vertical line between his eyebrows. He said after a moment, and it was as if he reminded himself as well as Bellott, "We must remember the hairpin, you know."

THEY moved along the trail across the lettuce patch. They examined two other footprints, all they found. One, an imprint of the right foot, showed clearly in every detail. With the necessary materials available, a perfect cast could have been made from the print. Bellott said as much to Westcott.

"We'd have the cast of a shapely foot," Westcott agreed. "One in which the arch is high." He thought that the toes, because of the way they spread out, had never been troubled too much by shoes; but he did not point that out to Bellott. Instead he handed Bellott the lamp. "I saw a pair of scissors on the veranda table. No doubt Deprez was using them to cut his toe nails. I'm going to get them."

He returned shortly with the scissors and a piece of light cardboard. Then for some minutes he worked carefully, and without words, to cut from the cardboard a foot that exactly fitted the print in Adolphe's lettuce bed. When he finished, he stowed the foot in a trouser pocket; and he led the way back to the veranda where Deprez still sat in the sagged wicker chair. Bellott put the lamp on the table.

Deprez grunted. "I suppose you found a hatful of clues? Use your cleverness now and find me the thief."

Another demand for his services! Sarah's words came back to Westcott: "The next time Deprez demands a favor of you, you demand that lease in return."

Here was his opportunity, he thought. He lighted a cigarette. He answered Deprez with an air of complete disinterest:

"I haven't any time for thief hunting. I have ten thousand wind-felled trees to clear from my land. I have to work from sunrise to sunset."

"A plague on your land!" Deprez exclaimed his irritation. "There is a thief on Fatu. That thief must be brought to justice."

Westcott shrugged indifferently; but he watched the Administrator closely when he said:

"That's your business. You're the Administrator."

Deprez's fat face was a picture of astonishment, of dismay. He groaned:

"I am ill, *m'sieur*. What the devil has got into you anyway?" There was despair in his voice. "For days I have been indisposed."

"Put Adolphe on the trail then."

Deprez swore. "That drunken swine! The only trail he can follow is the trail of a jug of rum." He said flatteringly, "You are the clever one, *mon ami*. You bring me the thief."

"Im a planter," Westcott replied. "If I had more land, land with bearing trees, perhaps then I could be more generous with my time."

Deprez squirmed uneasily in his chair. "*Mon Dieu!* More land! You hold lease on half of Fatu now. What more do you want?"

"The land to the south of my present leasehold, the old Lebeau plantation. I spoke to you about it last year. You haven't as yet approved my request."

"It is impossible," the Administrator declared. "You have too much land as it is." He dismissed the subject with a gesture. "Let us talk about the thief."

Westcott said coldly, "I am not interested in the thief."

"But, *m'sieur,*" Deprez protested uneasily, "the thief must be caught. Talk of this night will get to the ears of the Governor. I shall be the laughing-stock of the islands."

"That's your hard luck."

"Are you not a friend of mine?" Deprez pleaded. "Would you see me removed from my post? Take care," he warned then. "Another may be sent in my place who will not have your interest at heart." Again he fell to flattering Westcott. "You are the only one, *mon ami,* with the cleverness to catch that thief."

"My cleverness," Westcott said, "has a price—the Lebeau plantation." He went on before Deprez could say anything, "As conditions are today, with my present holdings in ruins, I'm wiped out. You know that as well as I do. I've been here ten years. Everything I have in the world is invested here. And now I can't stay here. My only chance to come out of it is to work the Lebeau place." And then he demanded, "Are you going to approve my request?"

"But *non,*" the Administrator said stubbornly, angrily. "I'll see you dance with the condemned ones first!"

WESTCOTT shrugged. "Then *au revoir*. It's after midnight, I'll have a hard day tomorrow. Come on, Captain!" He stepped toward the screened door.

Deprez threw up his hands in defeat. "*Sapristi!*" he shrieked. "Have it as you will! Take your pound of flesh—but save my face!"

Westcott faced about. "The pearls for the Lebeau plantation?"

"You can stick the *sacre* pearls in your ears," Deprez snarled. With a clenched fist he pounded the table. "I want the thief—dead or alive—before another sun sets on this island."

"For the lease I want on the old Lebeau plantation?"

"Agreed," Deprez snapped.

"Captain Bellott is my witness."

"All curses on both of you!" And Deprez hissed as Westcott, followed by Bellott, went down the steps, "Shylock!"

Back on the wide veranda of his own bungalow, his guest comfortable in an easy chair and with bottle and glass within easy reach of the captain's hand, Westcott filled and lighted his pipe. Then he seated himself in a chair by the table.

For a time he smoked in silence. Then from a pocket he took the shell hairpin he had found at Deprez's place. He fell to studying it.

"Make anything out of it?" Bellott asked after some minutes.

Westcott passed him the pin. "Smell of it." Stained brown in color, a brown that deepened to black at the double ends of

the pin, the carved ornament gave out a musty unpleasant odor.

"Smells dirty," Bellott commented after he had looked the pin over and held it a moment to his nose. He handed it back to Westcott.

Westcott frowned over it for some minutes more. He puffed thoughtfully at his pipe, turned the hair ornament in his hands, now and then sniffed of it.

"Dye," he said finally. "Black dye. The Madame colors her hair."

Bellott chuckled. "As I remember the Madame she was dark and wore a slight mustache—a small woman with nothing frail about her. Very animated, especially after a glass or two of brandy. She could swear like a pirate."

"She hasn't changed any."

"She's been here nearly twenty years. Someone of her family pays her a regular allowance to stay here. You think she stole those pearls?"

"The clues point that way," Westcott said. "But Deprez denies the clues. Of course I didn't say anything about the footprints."

"They are probably hers. Whose else could they be? Take her to Deprez in the morning," Bellott advised, "and get your lease."

"I'd like to. I've got to have that plantation, Captain. But—" Westcott shook his head slowly—"it won't be as easy as that. I'm not so sure a woman could have bagged Deprez and tied him up so easily.

"He claims he was awake. I'm inclined to believe that. Certainly then he resisted—any man would—and he is capable of resisting with some strength."

"Maybe," Bellott suggested, "the Madame had some help."

"We found no clue to indicate an accomplice."

"Maybe he didn't leave any. Who'd help the Madame in a case like that? You know everybody here. You ought to be able to make a pretty close guess."

Westcott puffed at his pipe a time before he answered. Then he said:

"Philocrate Charcot. He's a friend of Madame."

"Diable! There's a Frenchman with an unsavory reputation for you! He'll steal anything that isn't nailed down. I've heard it said, too, that he always carries a knife ready to use. Why not round up the both of them?"

"That wouldn't do. I have no evidence against either of them. That hairpin doesn't amount to much. Madame Tissot visits Deprez quite often. She might have dropped that pin the last time she was there. It may have been on the floor there for days. Deprez lets the wind do most of his sweeping for him."

"What about the footprints?" Bellott asked.

WESTCOTT frowned with uneasiness. Ever since he had discovered the footprints he had been uneasy about them. Madame Tissot was not the only woman on the island who had small feet. And more than that, Westcott from the first had had the feeling that the prints were too obvious. Whoever had made them had not needed to run across the soft, cultivated ground of Adolphe's lettuce bed. It would have been just as easy, if not easier, to have skirted the bed. It seemed to Westcott that the runner had crossed the soft ground purposely to leave footprints.

Why? He asked himself that question. What was the motive? Surely there was a motive. Did it have to do with him? Somehow Westcott felt that it did. He felt that the runner knew he would find those footprints, that as usual he would be acting for Deprez. Were the prints then meant to mislead him, confuse him? That was a possible explanation.

"I think I shouldn't put too much dependence on those prints," he said to Bellott. "There is something about them that warns me to go easy."

"What do you mean?"

"I don't know what I mean. I can't explain it. All I can say is that I'm disturbed about them."

And he was disturbed about them all through the night, so much so that he slept but little. Nor did he come to any conclusion more than he had, that the tell-tale marks had been made for his benefit, for his eyes to see and read. Would Madame Tissot have done such a thing as that? If so, why?

"Well?" Captain Bellott asked him the first thing in the morning. "What have you decided?"

"To go visiting."

"Madame Tissot?"

"Yes."

"I'm going with you," Bellott declared his intention. "As I told you, I haven't seen the Madame in years. I would renew an old acquaintance."

They set out immediately after breakfast. A mile or so from the lagoon Westcott pointed out a path branching from the right of the main trail and leading away through the forest that thickly clothed the steep north side of the valley.

"That goes to Aiken Talen's place," he told Bellott. "You know him, of course."

"*Oui.* A drunken beast."

"His hut is up on the ridge. You can't see it from here. It's built almost on the very edge of a cliff that drops sheer at least fifty feet. It's always a wonder to me Talen doesn't fall over and kill himself some night when he's drunk."

"There is always that hope," Bellott said.

The Madame's house, a redwood affair roofed with corrugated steel, set up on a foundation of basalt slabs. The veranda had the look of once being the playground of a mad, young cyclone, and Madame Tissot, sitting in a hammock, apparently had experienced recently a touch of heavy weather herself.

A small, boyishly built swarthy woman whose upper lip bore the faint trace of a mustache, she seemed wholly indifferent to the uncertain fastening of the sloppy kimono she wore. In her dark somewhat bloodshot eyes the warmth of no cordiality showed when she greeted her visitors.

"What do you two want up here?" she demanded roughly.

With a not too lately washed hand she pushed up on her head a half pinned mop of dyed black hair that had bagged down over her right ear.

"I come, Madame," Westcott replied, doffing his straw and making her a bow, "in the role of Prince Charming searching for Cinderella. In other words, I am looking for a foot."

Madame Tissot eyed him suspiciously.

"Well, look somewhere else for it! I'm in no mood to be charmed this morning."

Westcott laughed. "I came not to charm but to be charmed. I'm looking for the smallest foot on Fatu." He looked down at Madame Tissot's bare feet, small, high-arched—and dirty. "I have no glass slipper for you to try on," he said, "but, if you will permit me, I should like to make certain measurements."

"You're drunk!" Apparently Madame owned no morning humor for this sort of thing. "Get along with you!"

Westcott smiled. "You do not understand. I have made a bet that yours is the smallest, shapeliest foot on Fatu. Deprez scoffs. He claims there is another smaller, one of a more intriguing shape."

The Madame frowned. "The fat pig!"

"Who must be shown his error," Westcott said quickly to take advantage of her pricked vanity. "Will you permit me, Madame, to make some necessary measurements of your right foot?"

MADAME TISSOT hesitated. Some suspicion still lurked in her bloodshot eyes. Then, abruptly, she thrust out her right foot.

"Measure," she said roughly. "Then cram the measurements down that fat fool's throat!"

Westcott had come prepared with paper, pencil and scissors. He spread the paper on the veranda floor and had Madame step her right foot on it. Then with a pencil he drew an outline while Madame squirmed.

"But, *m'sieur,*" she protested once, "you tickle!"

The outline drawn, Westcott cut it from the paper. Taking from a pocket the cardboard foot he had made the night before, he compared the two. The print of Madame's foot was a good quarter-inch larger all around than the other.

Westcott frowned. "I lose," he admitted with great disappointment in his voice. "There is another smaller."

Madame Tissot snatched the two paper feet from his hands.

"Sacre nom!" her pique exploded. "Now whose foot is this?" In her eyes the unmistakable green fire of jealousy blazed.

Westcott smiled. A quick light of understanding gleamed in his eyes, he felt.

"A friend of Deprez's," he answered her question. "Adolphe tells me she is why the Administrator has not entertained you at his house lately."

"That red-faced *cochon* lies!" The Madame swore. "No later than last night was I entertained. We drank much cognac. I slept in the golden bed."

For a moment, uncertain of himself, Westcott hesitated. The night before when he and Bellott had hunted clues, they had not gone into any of the bedrooms in the Administrator's house. Westcott knew of course, as all the island knew, that one bedroom was furnished with a tarnished brass bedstead.

"But, Madame," he protested, "surely not last night. Deprez, himself, told me of this other guest. It was last night she was there with her small feet. She had beautiful hair in which she wore beautiful pins." From a pocket he brought out the shell hairpin and he showed it to her. "See! Here is one."

The Madame stared at it. Then she snatched the pin from Westcott's hand.

"That is mine! What more proof do you want that I was at the Administrator's house last night?"

Westcott got to his feet.

"Then it was you who so foully attacked Deprez, left him at death's door and stole the pearls!" Tall, dark, he stood and looked down at her accusingly. "I fear, Madame Tissot, you will be held to account. When I left the Administrator he was gasping."

In an instant jealous anger vanished from her eyes, like tongues of fire quenched by water. Fright took its place.

"What—what do you talk about?"

"Assault—robbery. At Deprez's house last night. You were there."

"But *non, non!*" wildly. "I was not! I was here! I have not been there in more than a week!"

"Your hairpin? It was found under Deprez's chair."

"That other one dropped it. The one with the small feet."

Westcott shook his head. "Nonsense. How could another woman have a pin of yours?"

"It was stolen from me. Two mornings ago I missed it. I had two."

"Who stole it? Did you have a visitor at night? Your hair must have been down. Was it?"

"Ah, oui, oui! I had a visitor who stayed the night."

"Who, Madame?"

She hesitated. Westcott watched fear tear visibly at her. Again her anger began to burn.

"Who, Madame?" Westcott insisted. He had to get it from her now or never.

Anger burned through her fear. Suddenly she spat a name.

"Charcot. He stole my pin and gave it to that other baggage."

Westcott warned her, "I'll find Charcot and ask him if that is true. Come on, Captain!" he said to Bellott. "We'll get to Charcot's house at once."

They hurried. A mile of damp trail led them through the forest to a shack thatched with pandanus. Trotting to keep up with Westcott, Bellott began to pant.

"You watch out now," he warned Westcott. "Remember that man carries a knife."

But with knives Philocrate Charcot was done. He sprawled on the earth floor of the single room of his shack, his head beaten to a bloody pulp. At the sight of him Westcott drew back. On the floor beside the body lay a reddened cudgel of native ironwood.

Gingerly Westcott picked up the stick.

"Talen's. Aiken Talen's. I've seen this stick before." And then suddenly, sickeningly, there came to him in a flash a full understanding of what his fear had been, the uneasiness that had possessed him from the night before. "I know the answer now," he said.

He threw down the cudgel, turned and ran from the terrible room.

He did not wait for Bellott. Down the trail he went, to the floor of the valley—down the valley trail, until he came to the path leading through the forest to Aiken Talen's hut. Into that path he turned.

Aiken Talen lurched from the doorway of the hut on the cliff; a heavily built man, medium tall. Red rimmed his eyes. A coarse stubble of grayish black made bestial a distorted face. Ragged overalls saved him from nakedness.

"What d'ye want?" he growled at Westcott. He held his arms tense, slightly curved from his body, his fingers bent.

"You," Westcott said coldly. "I just found Charcot. I'm taking you in."

Talen snarled, "Like hell you are!" He lunged toward a chopping block near to the door where stood an axe, the blade sunk into the wood.

He caught hold of the slanted handle of the axe. Before he could tug the blade free from the block, Westcott reached him with a rush and a right straight-arm blow to the jaw that sent Talen staggering back to trip and fall.

Westcott tugged the axe from the block, threw it to one side. Talen heaved himself cursing to his feet, a short, stout stick of green limb wood clutched in his right hand. With that he lurched at Westcott, struck viciously at Westcott's head.

Westcott ducked low. He came through Talen's arms with a right uppercut to the chin that almost lifted Talen from his feet; and he drove his left into Talen's wind. His right he smashed to the side of Talen's head.

Gasping, cursing, Talen hurled himself against Westcott, flung both arms about Westcott's body.

The two men thudded to the ground. There they wrestled while each fought to come uppermost. Once they rolled perilously close to the edge of the cliff. The fierceness of their struggling tore Westcott's shirt from him, ripped a trouser leg to the knee. Talen struck him across the face with the limb. The blow split Westcott's upper lip, started blood streaming.

Then Westcott got his long legs about Talen in a scissors hold that pinned Talen's cudgel arm helplessly against his body.

He caught Talen by the throat, shut off his wind until the man strained for breath and put out his tongue.

Tearing the stick of green limb wood from Talen's hand and hurling it over the edge of the cliff, Westcott got to his feet.

"Get up!" he ordered Talen. "Get up on your feet!"

Strangling and gasping, Talen got up slowly. He appeared shaken, as if all the fight had been choked from him; but suddenly he flung himself at Westcott again, once more got his arms about Westcott's body, and he threw Westcott down so violently that Westcott's head struck hard upon the ground.

The jar stunned Westcott long enough that Talen retrieved the axe Westcott had flung aside. With the blade swung up over a shoulder, Talen came back.

Westcott raised himself on an arm. He shook his stunned head to clear his vision. He saw Captain Bellott come panting up the path to stop abruptly at the edge of the clearing. He saw Bellott claw at his right hip trouser pocket. It was a blurred picture seen through unfocused eyes—the spurt of flame, the faint puff of smoke from the snapped up revolver. As if from far away he heard the report of the gun.

The up-swung axe fell from Aiken Talen's hands. The man sprawled face downward on the ground.

Bellott hurried over to Westcott. The captain was still panting heavily.

"Lucky!" he said over several times. "*Mon Dieu!* That was lucky!" He helped Westcott to his feet. "Are you hurt, *mon ami?*"

Westcott said, "No." His head was clearing rapidly. "He threw me. It stunned me for a moment." He looked toward the hut. "Sarah must be in there."

"*Dieu!* Keep her in there until I drag this body out of sight!"

WIPING at his puffed, bleeding lip, Westcott walked a bit drunkenly toward the hut, in through the doorway. Sarah lay face down in a corner. Her *pareu* had been all but torn from her, until now her back was quite bare, criss-crossed with the red stripes of a score of bruises.

Westcott knelt beside her. He lifted her, held her in his arms.

She opened her eyes, looked at him. A faint smile made tremble the corners of her lips.

"Bradley—you came—almost too late. I thought you would come—sooner. I thought you would know my footprints."

"I did. I didn't want to think they were yours."

"You didn't want to think I was a thief?" She closed her eyes. "I am a thief. I—I stole those pearls."

"But why, Sarah?" He held her closer to him. "Why did you do it? Why did you want those pearls?"

"The pearls? I didn't want them," she said in a whisper full of pain. "I wanted —trees—for you—the Lebeau place. I knew Deprez would send for you last night. I thought—I hoped you would demand a price for your service—a price to catch a thief. I hoped you would demand that lease."

"My dear!" Westcott's face muscles knotted as his jaws set tightly together. "I did demand the lease."

"And Deprez promised it?"

"Captain Bellott was my witness."

She freed herself from his arms so that with a hand she could feel under the mats on which she had been lying. From beneath those mats she drew out a packet wrapped in oilskin. She pressed it into Westcott's right hand.

"The pearls. Take them to him—and get your lease."

Sweat stood out on Westcott's dark, furrowed forehead. He stared with loathing at the packet in his hand.

"Take them to him, Bradley," the girl whispered. "Go now."

He groaned. "But I can't, Sarah. And I won't! You don't understand. He doesn't want the pearls. He wants you —dead or alive. That's what he said."

She smiled wanly. "Then take me. I'm still alive. If you had come a little later surely I would have been dead. Father—

he would have beat me more. He was mad with rage—and drink. He thought I was with Charcot last night. He went to Charcot's place this morning."

"I know," Westcott told her. "So did I. Bellott was with me. We found Charcot dead. Then we came here."

"You fought with father. I heard it."

"He would have killed me too if it hadn't been for Bellott."

"I heard the shot," she whispered. "I guessed the rest." A shuddering sigh shook her. She put an arm about Westcott's neck, and she pressed her face against his neck and began to sob.

"Oh, Bradley—dear—now what must we do?"

From the doorway Bellott said gruffly, "Don't be fools! Charcot stole the pearls. Talen fought him for them. Now you've got them. I'll tell that to Deprez—and I'll make him believe the story."

Ohio River Feuds Die Hard

CROSS CURRENTS

By KARL DETZER

Author of "Winner Take All," "Captain's Wife," etc.

CAPT'N JEFF HARTIN let himself down from the jig-saw pilot house to the hurricane deck of his packet, and glanced with elaborate unconcern across the broad Ohio River. His craft, the *Carrie Hartin,* was moored here at its own wharfboat on the Indiana side of the stream, its long soiled hempen lines hanging idly to the iron rings above the sunken dead-men on the bank, its fenders moaning gently as the slow swirl of waters rubbed them against the wharf.

Behind the *Carrie Hartin,* a lazy rise of ground, pockmarked with cobblestones, lifted to the level of the village street of Hartin's Landing. Across the river, a mile away, lay the Kentucky town of Juddsport, concealed for the most part by a long spit of wooded land.

The tawny Ohio rushed swiftly between the two towns. Only close ashore, beside Jeff Hartin's packet, it flowed more slowly, circling behind the boat, clucking sympathetically in the buckets of the big stern paddle wheel, as if its curiosity, or perhaps its pity, had been awakened by the sight of this steamboat with cold smokeless stacks.

Capt'n Hartin moved stiffly to the low deck rail and paused there, squinting against the morning light. He was a thin, tall man on the shabby side of middle age, in a blue coat somewhat glossy at the elbows, a pair of gray trousers slightly too short, and a blue cap with a long visor, tilted a little too far to the left. Under it, his hard blue-gray eyes examined the Kentucky shore, below the half-hidden town of Juddsport.

Below the bluffs, on the Kentucky side, a small white towboat with a gay red-leaded stern paddle wheel was visible. It lay under the outstretched arms of a black

conveyor, whose skeleton frame stretched inland among the huge cones of washed sand and crushed stone and river gravel.

A jet of steam flew like the plume of a war bonnet at the double stacks of the towboat, and even from where he stood on the Indiana side of the river, Jeff could make out the flashes of water at the stern, where the buckets of the wheel turned over. He glanced down at the letter in his hand, reached for his watch, and then remembered that he didn't have a watch any more. He had pawned it.

His eyes, a little harder now, returned to the towboat. A sudden larger burst of steam popped from its chime whistle, itself invisible at this distance. Hartin counted the seconds before the single long blast reached across the broad river. It echoed quickly, with an increased mellowness, against Indiana's low bluffs; then, winging once more above the swift yellow water, dissolved in a cadence of low sleepy notes among the Kentucky hills.

A BOARD creaked behind Hartin on the deck. He looked, over his shoulder, into the face of John Bogart, his mate.

"Oh, hello, John," Hartin said. "What can I do for you?"

His was a river voice. It marked the man as neither a Yankee nor Southerner, yet borrowed from both the south and north, from the soft accents of Kentucky and the slightly nasal tone of the Hoosier hills. But it was neither of these qualities men first noticed when Hartin spoke; what they heard, first, was pride, amounting almost to arrogance.

He repeated, "What can I do, John?"

The mate did not reply at once. At the moment he was busy, biting a chew from a twist of tobacco, and besides, he had steamboated long enough with Capt'n Hartin to understand his moods. While he gnawed at the tobacco, his eyes sought first the paper in Hartin's fingers, then the towboat on the Kentucky side of the river. At last he allowed his gaze to settle on the neutrality of the yellow water in mid-stream.

"I was wonderin', Capt'n," he said uncertainly, keeping his gaze discreetly off Jeff Hartin's face, "I was wonderin' about the coal. It's such nice May weather."

"I'll tend the coal," Hartin replied. His voice was sharp, and Bogart shuffled his run-over shoes uneasily. Jeff Hartin could not control the muscles of his throat as he did his hands and feet and eyes. The mate glanced at them, twitching. "We'll get plenty coal, John," Hartin said. "Plenty. Be going out next week, I reckon."

"Next week?" It had been "next week" ever since the ice floated past in March.

"About then," Hartin answered. He raised his voice, as though his hopes, if spoken in a louder tone, might more readily materialize. "I've been waiting. Business affairs. You wouldn't understand. But I'm about ready." He paused again, to glance across the river. The white towboat was pushing steadily upstream now, under the opposite bank, and piling a heap of froth above the fantail at its stern, water which from this distance shone white as seafoam, but which Hartin knew was slightly soiled by a yellow tint, were one to look closely at it.

Black smoke blew down the small wind from the two high stacks of the towboat. Bogart glanced from it to the idle chimneys of the *Carrie Hartin,* then bit off a twist. Bogart, watching him, knew from his forehead what turn his thoughts were taking. When Hartin was at easy mind, a trio of small wrinkles gathered between his eyebrows, spreading outward from the bottom like a spray of leaves. When these three lines disappeared, and in their place a deep dark crosswise furrow appeared, then Jeff Hartin, being proud, was thinking angrily of the Judds of Juddsport.

The deep wrinkle was there just now. Bogart knew why. He had known from

the start. That towboat, swinging out there busily in a wide circle, was the *Happy Valley*, with young Amos Judd at her wheel.

Those were Judd's big conveyors, standing black against the Kentucky hills; those silver and golden heaps of sand and gravel were Judd's. That smoke, pouring in rich, money-making, black clouds from those two stacks, came from Judd coal, while the *Carrie Hartin* idled there with chilly boilers and empty bunkers and an empty coal barge alongside.

"I was thinkin'," Bogart said, but Hartin's lean head shook irritably.

"Go ashore, Judd," he ordered. "Go up the path to town." He paused. The towboat was in mid-river now. Its flat bow was pushing toward the Indiana shore. He knew where it was coming. Right here, to his own landing. The letter in his hand had warned him. "Run on, John," he ordered the mate. "An' if that lazy watchman's aboard, take him along with you."

He waited, until Bogart and the shuffling watchman were atop the bluff, out of sight of the wharf.

WHEN the *Happy Valley* splashed alongside, Hartin was leaning back against the peeled white paint of his own pilot house. He heard young Amos Judd sound the gong in his engine room and then the back-up bell, with its shrill voice. The sternwheel of the towboat hesitated immediately, and splashed backward with straining crank and flanges and thrashing pitman, against the insistence of the current.

Hartin stared; then scowled. The *Happy Valley* always had been a trim boat. But it was gaudy now in new spring paint. Its name, in letters three feet high, stood out proudly in black stencil, shaded with deep blue, along the sidehouse of the main deck. Its upper workings glistened with fresh splashes of cobalt and apple green, its knee fenders and timberhead were striped black and steamboat white, and its two decks shone with red-lead, lavishly applied.

The wheel continued to revolve rapidly in reverse, until at last, with headway stopped, the *Happy Valley* floated deliberately down the backwater toward the Hartin wharfboat, so close that Jeff could see the small ventilation holes, bored to form the outline of a crescent moon, in the front of the rope locker; could even count the buttons on Amos Judd's white sweater as he turned over the wheel to his pilot and stepped down to deck.

Judd waved a hand in friendly greeting. But Hartin did not reply.

"Mornin', Capt'n," the other called then across the water. He was a smallish man, four inches shorter than Hartin, twenty-five years younger. He grinned, almost amiably, and Hartin resented that, too. "May I come aboard your steamboat, Capt'n?" the newcomer asked.

Still Hartin did not bring himself to answer. It had been forty years since any Hartin had spoken to a Judd, or Judd to Hartin, so far as Captain Jeff knew. It could be forty more, for all he cared. Then he remembered the empty coal barge and his empty watch pocket. Other things, too. There was the leak in the roof of the big house behind its stone wall on the point, the verandah crumbling away for lack of repair.

There was his daughter Carrie, named, like the packet, after her grandmother. His daughter, Carrie, working in an office, in Louisville. A Hartin woman working

in an office! It made no difference if half the women of the world worked in offices; Hartin women never had.

Amos Judd was leaning across the rail of the boiler deck now. So close he had floated that Hartin could see the freckles on the young man's nose, and the way the wind was tossing his reddish hair.

"What you want aboard for?" Hartin asked, and having spoken to a Judd, heard the tradition of three river generations tumbling about his ears.

"Matter of business," the younger man replied, and added hastily, "Nothing personal, I assure you. Not right now, anyway. Just business, like I told you in my letter."

"Listen, Judd," Hartin began. His voice caught, twisting in his throat like a fouled mooring line. He saw the crew of the tugboat watching from the door of the deckroom. Well, let them watch. "I don't like you, Judd," he said. "Understand?"

"Perfectly," Judd told him. "You've demonstrated that." He smiled again exasperatingly.

"I don't like any of your tribe, Judd," Hartin went on. "Or anything that belongs to you. That clear?"

"Clear as crystal, I tell you, this is business. Strictly business."

"Come aboard, then," Hartin granted. He looked at his own steamboat, and pride again filled his voice. "But mind how you do it. I don't aim to have my packet smashed by any towboat, painted or not."

Judd laughed. "I'll be careful," he promised.

THE two men stood in the pilot house of the *Carrie Hartin,* five short paces apart, with all the animosity of four generations piled between them. Only Judd did not seem to sense its presence. He had talked briskly, without apparent malice; had made his proposition, and now stood easily, hands in pockets, unlighted cigarette hanging to his lips, awaiting the reply.

Opposite him, Jeff Hartin braced his back against the spokes of the big steering wheel, as if somehow he were absorbing strength and confidence from it. He asked:

"And if I don't grant you the right to land your sandflats at my landings?"

"I'll land them somewhere else."

Hartin pointed out, "There *is* no other place. You say so yourself. The state road work starts here, just atop the bank. Your contract is to deliver the gravel there."

"Plenty of other landings, Capt'n," Judd replied. "All the way from town of Madison, down to Jeffersonville. I could truck it here from any of them."

"And lose money."

"I'll take that chance."

Hartin grunted, "It wouldn't make me stay awake nights worrying, Judd, for you to lose money."

Still Judd did not take offense.

"I told you I'd pay in advance," he argued, "and put up a bond to cover any damages to your wharfboat or landing. More than it's worth. I'd run my clamshell digger boat right in ashore—"

"*My* shore," Hartin interrupted.

"Your shore," Judd agreed. "Run her right in here above the wharf where your empty coal barge is tied. The bucket could reach out to the flats there, and in one lift drop the gravel in the motor trucks along the bank."

He paused. Hartin wasn't listening He hadn't even heard the last sentence. Mention of the empty coal barge caused his anxiety to mount and mingle with his inborn hatred of the Judds. The packet couldn't start its summer run without coal. And hadn't the dealers refused to sell him fuel without some cash in hand? No coal, no cash; no cash, no coal. And the house of Hartin falling to pieces for want of small repairs. And the packet needing paint. And Carrie working in an

office. He fingered his empty watch pocket.

If he only could get going, business would pay this season. There was lots of repairing, always, after a flood. Every day he saw the Green Line boats passing up and down river heavily laden, and the *Cary Bird* and the *Frohman Coots*, their decks packed with freight.

"Get this clear, Judd," he persisted. "There's no favor in this, neither to you or to me. No favor and no friendliness. And I want a decent, protecting contract drawn up——"

"I've got it in my pocket, with the check and the bond," Judd replied. "I'll protect you, never worry."

"My lawyer can decide on that," Hartin said. His lips thinned out into a hard line. "You pay in advance, but what you pay don't change what I think. I mind your whole family, father and grandfather—a worthless lot. My father knew your great-grandfather, and he wasn't any better than the rest of you. All alike. Dirty towboat men, you Judds, and you always will be, no matter how much money you make. A gang of riff-raff. That's what I think of you. Do I make myself clear?"

"Perfectly, Capt'n," Judd said, and smiled more pleasantly. "I know we've wasted a lot of time fighting, the Hartins and the Judds. And no good ever came of it. I'm ready to call quits."

"Quits?" Jeff Hartin repeated. His voice was heavy with scorn. "Oh, no! I can't call quits with the likes of you! It's beneath my decency. We'll do the business, and when it's done, it's done. I'll hold you to the contract, and I'll not grant you a minute that don't belong to you. Or a worry, either. If your whole fleet, digger and towboat and flats and barges everyone was to sink in midstream, I'd not lift a hand. That's how I stand."

"All right, let's sign up," Judd answered.

"Go ahead," Hartin bade. "I'll meet you at my lawyer's office, but I'll not walk there with you. I'll not be seen, anywhere, any time, walking with any Judd."

ONLY in the names of its dilapidated streets and in the double block of ancient red brick warehouses and tobacco barns which faced the river did the flavor of its former greatness cling to the town of Hartin's Landing. Tilted on rusted iron poles, the street names themselves were all but scrubbed away by forty years of rain—Memphis Street, Pittsburgh Avenue, Steamboat Lane, Warehouse Alley, Towhead Park.

Jeff Hartin did not look left or right as he stalked up the path at young Judd's rapid heels. No need for him to tell Judd who the lawyer was. Hadn't old Tabor Breckenridge brought suit in some Hartin's name against every Judd who came of age? Charging everything from trespass to violation of the navigation laws, from malicious mischief to damaging the business of the Hartin steamship line?

In those other days, when expansive newspapers referred to the Hartin packets as "gilded floating palaces, replete with every comfort and convenience," an early Hartin and an early Judd had quarreled. The trouble began in mid-river, on a foggy afternoon, when a Hartin steamboat bumped into a Judd raft, and scattered its logs along the banks of three states. Nothing more than that.

Old Tabor Breckenridge this spring morning ran with his shrewd eye through the contract, while Amos Judd stood before the desk and Hartin, with his back to the room, peered out of the window at a negro asleep in a mule cart. He'd rather look at that any day than at a Judd.

At last Breckenridge decided," Reads right to me, Jeff."

"Very good," Hartin said. "I'll sign."

The lawyer dipped his pen into the ink and tested it against his dusty blue blotter. "Right here, Jeff," he directed. "I'll have Miss Graham—she's a not'ry, Mr. Judd—I'll have her witness it."

So the job was done.

Hartin turned to Judd and ordered, "Get out now. I'll have the landing ready."

Amos Judd still smiled. He was whistling softly as he went through the door, and Hartin heard his feet tap quickly and positively down the stair. The door at the bottom closed noisily, and Hartin picked up the check. He overcame the impulse to tear it into pieces. This was business. And he wasn't actually indebted one cent to Judd. Not one red cent.

"He's getting that landing cheap," he repeated aloud. "Dirt cheap."

"Oh, sure thing," the lawyer agreed.

Hartin placed the check carefully in the empty pouch of his large, flat, shabby pocketbook, and without further words departed slowly.

Bright sunlight lay upon the quiet street, turning the air to liquid gold, and Hartin paused, blinking into it, then walked to the right past a row of solid, two-story brick buildings with small iron balconies. At the corner, where the Ohio Valley House still wooed transients, with a row of hickory chairs in the blue shadow of its wooden awning, Hartin paused. Just around the corner in Calliope Street, he saw Amos Judd again. The young man's back was toward him, his bright hair glistened in the sunlight. He was laughing, talking rapidly.

Hartin paused for an instant, then went on. No mere Judd would make him turn back, or send him down another street. He walked ahead doggedly. He would ignore the young man this time. Then he stopped again, suddenly, as if he had walked into an invisible wall.

He felt a quick and fearful constriction of his throat; the sidewalk twisted, his head went light. Judd was saying:

"Oh, sure, he signed. Made it plain he thought I was poison, but signed."

Hartin grasped the wall to support himself. That was his daughter Carrie, facing Amos Judd. His daughter, laughing. Laughing with a Judd. Not disrespectfully. But talking, laughing.

She was saying, "I wish all you rivermen wouldn't be so stubborn."

Hartin stepped forward. Carrie saw him first. He spoke slowly. His voice

was not loud, but each syllable was packed with ice.

"Go home, Carrie," he bade. "At once."

Judd swung around. The smile fell from his face and left it expressionless, with the yellowish freckles standing out on his white nose.

Carrie protested, "Father! You don't understand!" But her voice was thin.

Captain Jeff did not sway again. He stood like an oak mooring post, unyielding. Carrie looked appealing at him, then he saw her left shoulder rise slightly. She was obeying. But not speaking. That is, her lips did not move. Only her lifted shoulder was eloquent. It addressed her father and Judd with the same small, proud motion.

"Sorry!" it was saying to Judd. "Sorry he behaves this way!"

But to her father it asserted, "I don't care! I'm free! I work in an office, Jeff Hartin!"

She walked unhurriedly away, and Hartin said to Judd, "Now you get out. Across the river where you belong!"

He went away himself, stiff-legged, like a man in a dream.

Judd still was looking after him when the kindly shadows of the bank door took

the older man in. He worked long and late, attending the details of the new river season. He sent for his crew, ordered his mate to start sobering the cook, saw to the printing of the tariff lists, ordered coal, figured cautiously square footage for a single thin coat of paint, bought lead and oil.

The long shadows of the May evening lay across the brown dust of the River Road when at last he let himself in at his own gate. He propped it shut after him, and before stepping up to the dilapidated verandah, reached into his pocket and drew out his watch. *His* watch. He'd keep it this time. It pointed to seven o'clock.

CARRIE and her mother waited in the living room. They both had been weeping, but now, as he entered, they said nothing, while he took a long time to hang his hat on its peg on the walnut mirror rack. At last he sat down heavily and faced them.

"Well?" he demanded. His voice was still ice cold. All day, men hearing it, had known that something was wrong. Evening and homecoming had not thawed it.

His daughter said, Get it over."

She was twenty-two, and tall, like her father. But she had her mother's eyes, in color somewhere between velvet brown and purple, eyes transparent like windows, reflecting her smallest thoughts. Men, seeing the eyes, forgot the Hartin nose and the Hartin arrogance and pride.

Hartin said to his wife, "She told you?"

Carrie's mother answered, "Yes." She rocked, twice, and went on unexpectedly. "She told me you acted like a shanty-boater, Jeff Hartin."

"Me? Like a shantyboater?" Hartin exclaimed. The furrow between his eyebrows was black and straight in the lamplight. He had not expected to be put on the defensive. "Carrie talked to Judd," he said. "On the street."

"What of it?" Carrie asked.

"What of it?" he thundered. "This of it. You're a Hartin. Have you no pride? He's a Judd. That's all. You know."

"I know that's no excuse for the way you acted," she replied. "Speaking of pride!"

"You talked about me," he accused. "Laughed."

"Not at you!"

"Not *at* me, no. But with a Judd."

"I told him I was glad you signed the contract. He'd showed it to me last night."

Hartin stared, while her words sank in. Then he demanded, "Last night?"

She went on hotly, "I'd told him you'd never sign. You were too stubborn. Headstrong. You'd let the family starve first——"

Hartin repeated, "Headstrong." And then he added slowly, "Last night. So you—know Amos Judd? See him often?"

"For a long time. Months."

"Oh!" Hartin said. "And you kept it from me?"

"Not from me, Jeff," his wife said quickly. "She told me. I wouldn't let her tell you. I knew what trouble it was going to make—"

"Oh, yes, trouble," he said. He settled deeper in his chair. He felt outrageously mistreated.

"Talked to him about your family," he found himself saying. "And he listened to you. Sounds like a Judd. Making fun of your father—Carrie, I can't understand—"

Her shoulders gave their small, expressive shrug.

"We quite agree, Amos and I, about our families," she told him, "and about the ridiculous way you've carried on. He told me about his gravel. I asked why he didn't use your landing. It would help you both. I said you needed money."

Jeff thundered stormily, "You told a Judd that?"

"I did," she answered. "Wasn't it the truth?"

HE GOT up stiffly. There was nothing he could say, nothing that these women could understand. They had set their female minds against understanding. He felt old. All his life he had fought the river, and the weather, winter and spring floods and autumn drought, ice and heat. Fought Judds. But he couldn't fight women. He'd just keep on with the Judds.

He went out to the verandah and sat down. Below in the reedy chute where Rodgers Island cast its deep shadow on the darkening waters of the Ohio, frogs sang together. Down stream, the crimson pier lights of the Interstate bridge shone through the purple darkness, and across the stream the lamps of Juddsport flickered timidly. A train rumbled out upon the tall bridge, and crawling slowly, it painted the under side of its low smoke-cloud with reflections from its open fire-box door.

Jeff Hartin listened to the train and the frogs, and to the beating of his own heart, and to the creak of his wife's rocking chair. Then, upstream, another sound floated out of the still night, the low chime of a steamboat whistle, two short, three long, three short—the Judd company signal. The *Happy Valley* was greeting its digger up there on the gravel beds, calling for the first loads of material for the new road job. Its voice was gay. Young Judd no doubt was joking about the contract with his night digger crew.

Joking. And here sat Carrie, in the proud old house which tonight had lost its pride. What had come into her? Hartin jerked up his head. A painful, sharp suspicion had flapped darkly across his thoughts. But she couldn't be! Couldn't!

He got up and walked toward the door.

"Carrie," he called. He braced himself between the sides of the door. His daughter looked up from her magazine.

"Yes?"

"About this—this Judd." He had a hard time, now, uttering the name. "You ain't thinking of falling in *love* with him?"

Hartin saw his wife's chair begin to rock quickly. He watched his daughter's eyes which remained as steady as the pier lights on the bridge.

"I love him now," she replied.

Hartin pressed the sides of the door tightly with his fingertips. He must keep on his feet, no matter what shame he felt. "Well," he said at last, "love him then. If that's the kind of Hartin you are. Love him. I can't stop you. Only, don't see him again. I *can* stop that. Don't see him, though. Or speak to him. Or write him. I'll not tell you to forget him. Wouldn't do no good. You'd remember in spite of me."

"Yes, I'd remember," she agreed. Her voice was as cold and emotionless as his own.

"One other thing, though," he added. "I hope he drowns in mid-river, him and all his crew. I'd not throw a life board to save him. I hope he drowns, and takes a long time drowning. And you watching!"

"Jeff!" his wife cried.

"That's how I feel," he finished.

He returned to the verandah. The frogs still sang untroubled in the chute. Up the river the voice of the *Happy Valley* echoed jubilantly among the hills.

IT WAS that way for many nights. Jeff Hartin sat alone on the verandah, his wife and daughter together in the living room. All day while he labored on his packet, patching, painting, testing boilers and hull, fitting new fenders, rigging new cables to the tiller, he pretended not to see Judd and the *Happy Valley* bustling in to Hartin's Landing, with flats of gravel for the new road, splashing upstream, empty, after more.

And each day, impatient to start his own season, he met first one delay and then another. Rain halted the paint job on the *Carrie H.* The new flues for the

boiler were a week slow in coming from the factory.

The new cordage, when at last it did arrive, was not the sizes he had ordered. So it was June before the *Carrie Hartin* made its first pay trip.

Captain Jeff had planned a double crew, with an extra pilot and engine room gang, so that he could run day and night, every day, and take advantage of the summer weather. But his daughter troubled him. Perhaps, he decided, it would be better to make only three trips up river to Cincinnati each week instead of six. That gave him three nights at home, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Sundays. Sunday night at home would be especially good. He would know, then, if Carrie were at home.

Besides, he argued, he was an old packet man. He didn't need six trips a week to make the season pay. Didn't even need wharfboats to land. Why, there were only three wharfboats left between Hartin's Landing and Cincinnati. But that didn't matter to him. He could nose up to the bank and swing his long white landing stage to dry footing anywhere the merest dog path ran down to the water. He carried any kind of freight, too—motor trucks and jars of buttermilk, a calf and a barrel of potatoes, a thousand bricks or a new hat for some woman on one of the islands, vats of pickled pork, crates of fresh berries.

The season started well. He had a roll of money in his pocket when he came in from his first up-river run, so he called to his daughter and directed:

"You'll not work any more in anybody's office. Tell them you quit Saturday. I can support my family. Always did."

"I'd rather not quit," she argued.

He stood up, shaking. "We'll not discuss that. You don't love the office, too, do you?"

"No," she replied. "Not the office, too."

"Then you quit," he thundered. "Understand?"

She did not answer.

You quit tomorrow. Not Saturday. Tomorrow."

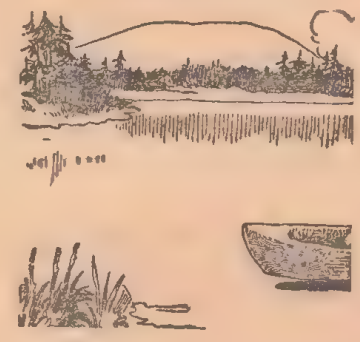
His vehemence frightened her, he supposed. She did not return to the office. Instead, day and night, she remained in the big old house and watched Judd and the *Happy Valley* pass up river and down.

It was a hot August. The night of the second Tuesday was one of those gasping river nights when the steamboat whistles echo endlessly, over and over, among the hills. Lightning played in the north, promising rain.

And in spite of the floods, the river now needed rain, Capt'n Jeff reflected. It had lost its yellow complexion of the spring, and flowed dark above the pools, and wore white lace along the rapids below the bridge.

ALL week steamboating had been difficult. Just this evening, on the down trip homeward from Madison with a deckload of iron castings and crated furniture, he lost the channel above Five Mile Island; got into the shallows and discovered a new sand bar. He had missed it by only a pole length, and had seen Amos Judd watching him from the *Happy Valley* as he swung back to midstream.

Judd's towboat was tied up beside his digger now at the lower end of the island. Some time tonight it would bring down a pair of flats, each laden with six hundred yards of fine washed gravel for the road.



Hartin grunted. He must moor his own packet carefully again out of Judd's way on that portion of the wharfboat he had reserved for his own use.

He tried to forget Judd as he tied up. His roustabouts began at once to trundle their iron-wheeled trucks of freight to the warehouse. Hartin took a final look around his boat. On the boiler deck he met his chief engineer.

"I'm goin' to draw off fires, Cap," the engineer reported. "Want to look over the flues."

Hartin nodded. "Very good. Soon's the heavy cargo's unloaded."

He returned to the hurricane deck and sat down there, where a small breeze played across the boat. He'd have to wait till the freight was unloaded before he went home.

He lay back and went to sleep.

It was dark when he awakened. Bogart the mate was standing over him. "All done," he said.

"Tell chief to pull fires—" Hartin began.

Then he stopped. The mate was not listening. He had turned and stood bending forward, watching the black water upstream.

"What's that, Cap?" he asked.

Hartin stood up. A boat was drifting down river toward him. It was turning slowly, broadside on, head on, broadside. Its lights shifted, red and green and white.

It came on and on. Hartin saw the two dark patches following it. They were sand flats; cast off, when it found itself helpless.

"That's Judd's towboat!" the mate cried.

Hartin grunted. He knew. He'd recognized it. Recognized the *Happy Valley* at midnight on the blackest river in hell! A quick exhultation seized him. Judd in trouble!

That was fine. Let him get himself out of it! There wasn't anything in the binding contract about Jeff Hartin going to any Judd's aid!

The helpless boat floated nearer, out of the channel, on this side of the river.

"Ain't he going to blow short blasts?" Bogart cried.

"He knows we wouldn't come to help him if he did," Hartin replied.

THE mate stared at him, muttered something under his breath.

"What's that?" Hartin demanded.

"Nothing," Bogart answered.

The *Happy Valley* drifted opposite the landing. Hartin could see men out on its stern. They were on the fantail, and cylinder timber, chopping with axes, pounding mauls. He guessed what had happened. Judd's towboat had old-fashioned outside cams. A rope had got caught in them, wound up, probably had broken them, making the paddle wheel helpless.

Hartin walked to the edge of his deck, where he could see better. Let Judd figure it out.

Figure it quick, too. The Interstate bridge was only a quarter mile below, and below the bridge, the rapids started.

"He ain't got much time," Bogart said.

Hartin grunted again. He could hear Bogart's deep breathing in the darkness beside him, and the low voices of the men, on the maindeck. He heard the chief engineer running up the narrow stair.

"Going to give a hand, Cap?" the engineer cried.

"He didn't ask for a hand," Hartin said.

"No, didn't ask. Only——"

"Only nothing," Captain Jeff retorted.

"But he's headed toward the north bridge pier, Cap! If he hits——"

"He'll sink," Hartin said savagely.

"In the rapids!" Bogart cried. "And he's going to hit! Can't miss—"

"Going to hit!" the engineer's voice lifted.

"Going to hit," Hartin agreed.

The words were not out of his mouth before a cry struck sharply across the water. A woman's voice. Shrill with panic. A woman, standing on the bank above the landing road.

"Amos! Amos!" it screamed. "Sound your whistle—he'll have to help—*have* to—"

Jeff Hartin felt his spine stiffen. What was Carrie doing out on the river bank, this time of night? He started toward her.

Then he paused, expecting, himself, to hear Judd's distress whistle. But Judd did not call.

"He won't ask any help off you," Bogart muttered.

The *Happy Valley* was drifting rapidly toward the bridge pier. Up stream, coming more slowly, the two laden flats thumped together. The pier lay straight before the boat. In four minutes, five——

Jeff Hartin suddenly bade, "Cast off them lines! Get up your steam, Chief!"

He was climbing to his pilot house. Cursing himself, but climbing. Snatching open the door, gripping his wheel, stepping on the whistle trip for one long blast. Cursing himself and Judd.

Why was he going out? Judd hadn't asked for help. He owed Judd nothing. Nothing. He'd rather see the towboat sink and Judd with it, than lift a finger.

He sounded the gong, and then the backing bell, half speed. Then stop. Half speed ahead. Full speed.

He swung the steering handles. The phosphorescent tiller marker slid over obediently on its long wire while the spokes of the great wheel spun. He headed for the towboat and pier and sounded his whistle again. The *Happy Valley* did not reply.

Would he make it? Would he get there in time?

HE YELLED for more speed. But he was still eight boatlengths away when the *Happy Valley* hit the pier. He heard the rip of timbers and the snap of iron, saw Judd's two tall stacks shake their heads, then list to port. Limping, the boat edged around the pier and turned toward the rapid.

Bogart, from the door, cried, "She's going down, Cap!"

Hartin answered, "Get below. Get lines ready to take hold of her." He still was calm.

"She's sinking, Cap! We can't get her ashore!"

"We can get the crew off."

Hartin swung his packet alongside the sinking boat. He couldn't down the guilty feeling in him. He hadn't started soon enough. Steam was roaring from emergency cocks in the *Happy Valley*, guarding against too much pressure when the boilers touched cold river water. He hadn't started soon enough—Judd hadn't asked him to, either.

Ropes thumped. Through the slot between the head board and the breast board of the pilot house, Hartin saw Judd's crew climb to the *Carrie Hartin's* deck. He counted them—cook, deckhand, mate, fireman, engineer. Five off.

Where was Judd?

"Best hurry!" Hartin shouted.

It was then he saw Judd.

The young man was standing, feet braced, arms at his sides, on the front of the boiler deck of the towboat. Hartin stared. Judd wasn't coming off. He would go down the rapids with his boat. Turn over with it. Sink with it. Drown.

Hartin released the tiller handles.

"Come along, Judd!" he invited.

"Go to hell, Hartin!" Judd replied.

His voice was cheerful. Jeff grunted.

He ran down from the pilot house, and leaped.

The deck of the sinking boat was too steep for comfort. And Judd had backed, obstinately, against his tilting pilot house. Hartin reached for him.

"Get off my boat, Hartin," Judd bade.

Hartin swung from his shoulder. His great, clamped fist caught Judd unexpectedly and the younger man dropped.

Hartin caught him in his arms as he fell. Awkwardly he pulled him down the narrow, unaccustomed stair, hit him again

when he struggled, found the deck of his own boat.

"Cast off!" he panted. "Quick! Have to run for it, Bogart!"

The current of the rapids already was sucking at the *Carrie Hartin's* sides. Dropping Judd, unconscious, on the boiler deck, Jeff ran for his pilot house. His stern wheel turned over. He headed up stream.

It was fifteen minutes before he felt his fenders scrape the wharfboat. He turned then, and looked. There was no sign of the *Happy Valley*.

"Tie up," he ordered the mate.

HE WENT ashore without looking at the prostrate Judd. On the bank Carrie was waiting.

"What you doing down here?" he demanded.

"I saw him in trouble," she answered. "Each night I watch for him. I hear him signal me, when he starts down from the digger. I watch him go past."

He looked uncomprehendingly at her.

"I didn't promise I wouldn't do that!"

"No," he agreed. "Nor that you would forget him."

She asked, "Where is he?"

Hartin pointed toward his boat.

"He's a fool," he said. "Wouldn't even come aboard. I made him. Made him, understand? I hit him. Hit him!" He looked at his fist. "He didn't ask for help. But I went."

"Late!"

"Late. But I went. In time to get *him*, anyways. He said he wouldn't come aboard. But he came. Understand?"

She was trembling. "No," she said.

"I'll tell you, then. Hartins are still better men. Better'n all the Judds. If there was ever any doubt in your mind. Now come home."

"And if I don't?"

"Come home," he repeated.

He took three steps up the bank, then turned. She had not moved.

"Come," he bade again, and took three more steps.

"Father," she began.

In spite of himself, he waited to hear what she would say.

"You promised you'd let him drown in mid-river," she reminded him. "With me looking on. Remember? I haven't forgotten, either."

He waited.

"You broke that promise," she said. "And I promised not to go to him. Not to see him. Now, I'm breaking mine."

She walked slowly down the bank and across the plank stage to the deck of the packet. A dark shadow was waiting for her there. Jeff Hartin turned his back. He didn't need to look. He knew. After all, Carrie was *his* daughter.

A Hartin. She'd take what she wanted.

He lifted his chin.

"She's got it, too," he said, and what he meant was Hartin pride.

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Baboons of the Abyssinian Border

A BABOON male in his prime is not always the bored looking old gentleman who sits scratching himself on the floor of a zoo cage, while visitors feed him with nuts and bananas. Not by any means, and this is particularly the case with regard to those Baboon families who frequent the borders of Southern Abyssinia.

One is aware of the damage Baboons can do to crops, while often campaigns are made against these predatory animals to kill them off and also to discourage their activities on farms.

The Baboons who live among the mountains that form the frontier between Kenya Colony and Abyssinia are of a much larger size than those usually seen in the Union, while it is no uncommon occurrence to meet families of several hundreds strong trekking through the forests and bush of the wilderness.

A few years ago I had been sent from Moyale, a British frontier post, to a place facing the Abyssinian Settlement of Gaddaduma, which lay ten miles on the other side of British soil. It had been garrisoned with some three thousand troops, and we were anxious to keep an eye on their activities.

I took with me some fifty mounted Somali "askaris," and my cook and Nandi boy. We built the usual stockade of thorn and scrub, and pitched our tents in the centre, and sat down to await developments.

To one who has tried it, this game is extremely boring, for apart from small patrols, there is nothing to do. There is practically no game to be seen in the district, except for leopards and an occasional buck, but the country seemed to swarm with Baboons, who, more often than not, simply sat tight in the middle of the track, and refused to budge from our way until a couple of shots were fired over their heads. Then with angry chattering they would scatter into the bush.

ONE evening I was sitting by the camp fire enjoying for a change a meal of bread and sardines instead of the monotonous sardines and bread, when I heard a low cooing sound from nearby. It was a plaintive little sound, low and melodious. "Cooooo, cooooo."

This went on for some time, and at last I called my orderly to search for the origin of the sound, which we knew was being made by a small monkey. After a while the man returned, and he held in his hand a tiny Baboon. It could not have been more than a week or so old.

The tiny object was one of the most pitiful sights I had ever seen. It stood about six inches high. Its body was extremely thin, the bones being covered with loose skin sparsely hidden by tufts of soft silky brown hair. But it was its head that held my attention, for compared to the body it was huge. The little face that peered into mine, had a pair of the largest brown eyes, the ears were small and well

formed, the skin was wrinkled and old, like that of an ancient human being, while its neck was thin and scraggy.

For some unknown reason it seemed to have been lost by its mother, which was very strange, for as a rule, youngsters cling to their mothers' fur with an iron like grip, and it is not often that a young one is separated from its parent.

The men were of the opinion that its mother had been killed by a prowling leopard and so the young one had been cast into a bush to fend for itself. At any rate here it was, and we immediately called it Koko.

My sergeant disapproved very strongly of our keeping the animal, for he said that its cries would attract other Baboons to our camp, and as we had already suffered from their raids, when dates and other rations had been stolen, he wanted me to leave it in the distant bush.

For a moment I hesitated, but one look into the pleading little eyes decided me that I would keep the animal.

I took an old army sock, and cutting off the foot from the ankle, made Koko an excellent jersey, for the nights and morning were cold and misty, and small monkeys catch pneumonia very easily.

It fed on goat's milk mixed with water, while all its spare time when not feeding, it clasped its legs and arms around my puttied leg and remained staring up into my face.

Naturally I had more to do than to nurse a monkey, so we arranged a bed of gunny bags on which we placed Koko. Then the trouble began. Hour after hour it wailed without ceasing, until at last I began to think seriously of giving the struggle up. Then Koko developed a cold, so could not be abandoned.

It was then reported to me that more and more families of Baboons were congregating in the vicinity. All through the days that followed we heard them chattering in the bush while contrary to custom, when we met them on the paths they scuttled out of our way.

For three days Koko cried incessantly. His cold became worse, and at last I could see that the poor little chap was dying. We did what we could, but one morning we found him curled up in his sacking dead.

We buried Koko, and thought no more of the matter.

But not so the Baboon families. With Koko's death they became more courageous. No longer did they lurk in the shelter of the trees, but came into the open, when sitting in a huge circle around the camp, they watched our movements with gleaming eyes. This state of affairs began to prey on our nerves, while the Somalis openly stated that they were frightened.

When we saddled up for patrols, the Baboons vanished into the bush, but we

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knew that many of them followed our mules, for from time to time we would hear their angry chatter from the undergrowth.

One day when we returned to camp, we found the sentries and my boys in a great state of fear. They said that no sooner had we vanished from sight, than the Baboons assembled in their hundreds and had sat snarling and grinning in their usual circle.

There seemed to be one, a huge fellow, who was their leader. In his ungainly fashion he would walk along the ranks of his army, gibbering and snarling, as if exciting them to attack.

Gradually they had closed in on the thorn fence, until one of the sentries had fired. With their nerves at breaking point, the others had followed suit, when the Baboons had vanished leaving four dead on the ground. These were produced for my inspection, and then cast into the undergrowth some distance from the camp.

I wished that I had never seen Koko or his cursed relatives.

It was then that I noticed that the Baboons were taking particular interest in my orderly and myself, until I did not care to leave the camp alone, and never unarmed.

One morning some duty took me to the top of a small hill a hundred yards or so from the camp. The way led through dense bush until the summit of the knoll was reached. The far side was bare of undergrowth until at the foot a clearing was reached which stretched to a thicket on the far side.

The summit of the hill was out of view of the camp.

Accompanied by the orderly we set out armed with our rifles, and as we had seen no Baboons for the last twenty-four hours, we hoped that they had given up their siege.

We reached the summit without untoward incident, and I sat gazing towards the border.

My thoughts were broken by hearing the orderly's voice.

"Ah, Bwana, see, the monkey King, and all alone."

I LOOKED in the direction of his pointing hand, and sure enough, walking across the clearing at the foot of the hill was the leader of the Baboons. He must have been about an hundred yards distant.

Fascinated, I watched him. Without doubt he was the largest Baboon I had ever seen, and the clear light magnified his size out of all proportion. There was no sight or sound of any other Baboons in the vicinity.

Slowly he crossed the clearing, then without pause, turned and retraced his steps. His feet and arms moving backwards and forwards in an irregular ungainly motion.

"Now is our chance," I muttered. "Here is the King all alone, and if we shoot him the others will go away forever."

For a moment the boys looked doubtful. "If you kill their King, perhaps they will attempt revenge," one of them said.

"Nonsense," I replied. Picking up my rifle I took careful aim, and fired.

With the crash of the explosion, I decided that never again would I shoot a monkey unless absolutely forced to do so.

The Baboon had been standing upright as I took aim, but just as I pressed the trigger, he had sunk to his usual crouching position. Instead of my bullet piercing his heart, it had smashed the shoulder.

The animal lay writhing on the ground, while uttering the most human wails and shrieks I had ever heard before.

I felt my hands shaking. "Quick, Kipkaino," I cried to the orderly, "run down, and put the poor beast out of his misery."

The boy pushed a cartridge into the breach of his rifle, and dashed down the hill.

As he reached the wounded Baboon's side, it turned and snarling made an at-

tempt to attack him. Kipkaino leaped back, then leveling his weapon shot the animal through the head.

At the sound of the second shot, I saw the far edge of the clearing had become alive with Baboons. Literally in their hundreds they emerged from the trees.

Kipkaino turned to run, but paused, and bringing his rifle to his shoulder fired rapidly into the mass. Meanwhile I had commenced to empty my rifle over the orderly's head. The sudden fusillade, made the Baboons pause, while Kipkaino ran back a few steps, while he reloaded.

The Baboons' attack was most determined, and in spite of their heavy casualties, for we could hardly miss as we fired into the mass of brown bodies, they came on.

Five minutes must have elapsed since the first shot had been fired, and the sound had brought a Corporal and a few men rushing from the boma to see the cause of the volleys, for on the Border one has always to be on the alert against attack from Tigree outlaws.

As the party arrived, Kipkaino had reached the foot of the hill, while the clearing was black with Baboons. The screeching of the wounded was deafening, while the snarls of the attackers made the surroundings akin to the demons from the Pit.

The Askaris took in the situation at a glance, and their rifles added to the din. This was too much for the Baboons, who paused, then turning, vanished from sight.

I rose with a sigh of relief, while Kipkaino joined us breathless with his exertions. His ebon face was gray with fear. I must own that my hands were shaking.

After this episode the Baboons left us in peace, for not again during the time I was out on that patrol did I hear a Baboon.

Even to this day I feel a sense of fear when the cough of a Baboon sounds in the undergrowth, while not for all the wealth of the Indies would I keep a monkey in captivity.

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